

# BEADLE'S Dime New York Library

Copyrighted, 1896, by BEADLE AND ADAMS.

ENTERED AS SECOND CLASS MATTER AT THE NEW YORK, N. Y., POST OFFICE.

August 12, 1896.

No. 929.

Published Every  
Wednesday.

*Beadle & Adams, Publishers,*  
92 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Ten Cents a Copy.  
\$5.00 a Year.

Vol. LXXII.



OR,

## SPOTTER SPANGLES' SCOOP.

BY CAPT. HOWARD HOLMES,  
AUTHOR OF "HIRAM HAWK, THE HARLEM  
DETECTIVE," "MAJOR BULLION," ETC.

### CHAPTER I.

#### THE MYSTERIOUS BACKER.

"One more trial, Joe, and then we'll go."

"The bar's cracked—"

"But it's all right for another whirl. Come; hurry up! I've got an engagement."

"With Gopher?"

"Not to-night. Gopher's all right, if he is a little eccentric; and when we're on the road we'll find use for him."

THE SHOWMAN SPORT RECEDED, BUT THE TERRIBLE HAND HELD HIM WITH  
A GRIP OF IRON.



This was said in a large, well furnished second-floor apartment. It was well supplied with trapezes and other appliances for athletic sports.

Of the two occupants of the apartment, one was tall, dark face, and with the eyes of a hawk; the other, his junior by ten years, was youthful looking, handsome, with a frank, open countenance, which betrayed good breeding—refinement.

The one was in full dress, the other in his shirt sleeves, which exposed his limbs and his excellent muscle, just the right amount for a successful acrobat.

The youth mounted the trapeze bar and the other looked on.

"There, that ends it for to-night," said the young performer, at last. "I think I can get some applause from the crowds that will flock to the tents when we are fairly on the road."

"Of course you will, Joe, and, with your bare-back riding, you'll be the drawing star of the Great American circus."

Both men laughed at this, and the youth began to don his street clothes.

"Which way?" he said to his companion at the door of the room. "I think I shall drop in on Jack a few minutes."

"Very well. I'll see you here to-morrow at the usual practice hour. Things are going on swimmingly, and the Great American will soon be equipped for the road."

Joe Vincent looked closely at the speaker and then laid one hand on his arm.

"You will pardon me, George—Mr. Farrell, I should say; but the old query comes up with emphasis just now. I would like to know who is putting up for it all."

The dark face seemed to grow a trifle darker, and the eyes appeared to recede.

"I think you'd better put off the inquiry," was answered. "I don't want to have to refuse you anything, Joe, but—"

"Don't, then," broke in the youth. "I can wait, for it will come out some day, and I'll know who our backer is."

"I hope so, Joe. We'll get on the road in a few days, and then you'll see the money come in."

They proceeded to the street, and on the pavement halted for a moment.

The dark man lit a cigar while the acrobat watched him with more than passing curiosity.

"To-morrow, Joe. Don't forget the hour," said George Farrell. "I'll be prompt, and I shall expect as much of you."

"That's all right," was the answer, and they parted.

On the corner the youthful acrobat stopped and looked at the figure making off up the street.

The well-built figure and clear-cut face of Farrell were still in sight, and Joe Vincent watched them till they vanished.

"I might have solved a part of the mystery by following him," he suddenly thought. "It worries me not a little. I like him and I don't like him. He has eyes I can't fancy, for they seem to read one's inmost thoughts, and then I catch him gloating over me as a hawk gloats over a dove, though I'm not exactly a bird of that sort. Is he going to see Gopher, the evil genius of my life? Is he going to have a talk with the manager of the Great American, or will he drop in upon our mysterious backer—the gold-bug who is sending the Great American on the road? I'd like to know."

The circus performer was in doubt just what to do. Why not shadow the other and thus solve at least one of his doubts?

He could at least do that, and at once started on his quest—to shadow George Farrell.

That individual had turned the first corner and was walking rapidly down the cross street.

The strong, keen wind blew through

the long hairs of the black mustache and made him lower his face.

A good many people were on the street, but soon the young acrobat caught sight of the familiar figure, to discover that Farrell was not alone.

He had a companion—a man a little shorter than himself and as heavily set.

They were close together and evidently were conversing.

"That's Gopher now!" exclaimed Joe, the moment he saw the new man. "Is it an accidental meeting, or was Goldstar waiting for Farrell round the corner?"

He neared the couple and tried to catch the trend of their conversation, yet not for the world would he have been seen.

"It's all O. K.," he heard Farrell's companion say. "There's nothing, absolutely nothing, in the way."

"That's good."

"We have the whole matter right in our hands, George."

"Yes, yes, and there it's safe. How's the boy doing?"

"Splendidly!" cried Farrell. "He improves every time he practices. He's a marvel on the bar, and he'll do equally as well in the ring."

"That's good. Fairy is mastering her art just as well, and she'll be the drawing card, next to Joe."

For a moment the two men walked along in silence; then the listener heard Farrell ask:

"He never suspects, Gopher?"

"Not he! Why, the stream will flow just as long as we keep our eye on it."

"And as long as they don't suspect."

"That's true; but how can they find out? You see, I'm looking after that part of it, and the secret belongs to us and to no one else."

"Yes, yes; but there's the Man in Blue—the little fellow who vanished some years ago."

Gopher Goldstar laughed.

"He's dead, George," he said.

"If I thought so—if I had the proofs of that—I could go out on the road with the Great American all right."

"I can't convince you, it seems; but, never fear. The little man's dead, and we won't be bothered by his ghost."

By this time the two had reached a corner, and in a moment more had vanished from Joe Vincent's eyes.

When the acrobat came to the corner they were gone as if the sidewalk had opened and swallowed them!

He looked in every direction, but the two were not to be seen.

A few steps from where he stood was the half-open door of a saloon, and beyond it a restaurant famous for its grills.

"Farrell likes a grilled bone," thought Joe. "But I'll not disturb him. Let them go. They've got something new on their string and they're bleeding the man who is putting up for the Great American. Why should I make a fuss so long as I get my wages and have a good time on the road?"

He turned back without investigating either the restaurant or the saloon.

"I would like to see this patron," thought the acrobat. "I would like to know the person who is putting up all the money and keeping in the background. George once told me that he was a retired sport, and heaven knows there's a lot of them in New York. But all of them aren't millionaires. This Croesus is an oddity, and he opens the floodgates of gold at Farrell's bidding, and the yellow stream seems to flow on forever."

Joe's musing was stopped by a person who accosted him, and he looked down into the face of a boy.

"You couldn't give a feller a nickel, eh, boss?" piped the little chap. "It's just this way. I'm Buttons, that's all. You kin see that I ain't Wanderbilt or Jay Gould. I'm not the rich bloke what is puttin' the Great American on its feet—"

The acrobat uttered a low cry.

He caught the boy's arm and dragged him into a convenient doorway.

"What do you know about the Great American?" he asked.

"A good deal, boss, but, you see, I'm not connected with the show, though I knows something about the managers—Gentleman George and Gopher. Why, them chaps ought ter be elsewhere instead o' managin' a show what is about ter start out an' rake in the sheckels. If it wasn't for the backer—an' he's a daisy, you see, with the rocks an' the disposition—why, they'd be walkin' ties in some country district over in Jersey. But they're shrewd, though; they know just how ter squeeze the goose what lays the golden eggs, an' there'll never be too much pressure put onto the squeezer—jes' enough ter fetch the rocks."

"But who is this man—the backer of the Great American, I mean?"

The boy—Buttons—drew back the length of the acrobat's arm and gave him a stare of wonder.

"What's it ter you?" he asked. "I jes' happened ter mention that I wasn't that individual for fear you might take me for him."

"But you know who he is?"

"I know."

Joe dived one hand into the depths of his pocket and drew out a quarter.

He placed it in the boy's hand and pressed his slender finger down over it.

"Jeewhiz!" cried Buttons. "You must have a gold mine somewhere."

"Not quite, but I pay for information."

"Like a prince, at that," said Buttons. "I'll be liberal with you. His name is Harold Hart."

"You don't mean Hart, the millionaire, the man who last year got his name in the papers by several eccentric acts?"

"The same man. Why, he's rich. That's the man who is behind the Great American; but if Farrell an' Gopher knew what I've been tellin' you they'd have spasma."

"Nearly, if not quite," observed Joe Vincent, with a smile. "Harold Hart, eh? Why, he's not regarded as entirely responsible."

"He's responsible enough for Gentleman George and Gopher," grinned Buttons, as he drew off a step. "He used to be a sport himself—Hart did. He used ter foller the races and back the hosses. But he don't do that any more. He's past it, but he takes an interest in the sporting world, and him an' Floss—"

"Who's Floss?"

"His ward. Don't know her, eh? No? Don't try ter get acquainted. If you do you'll find Gopher in your hair, an' Gopher's a holy terror when he's roused."

"You don't tell me that Gopher wants to possess the girl besides robbing the old man?" Joe exclaimed.

"I make no charges," returned Buttons. "Let 'em fight it out. I know Gopher an' I've seen Floss. I also know a little about George Farrell an' a trifle about Harold Hart. Beyond that I don't go. See?"

Joe Vincent turned away and left the boy looking after him.

Luck had come to him direct, and he knew the name of the mysterious backer of the Great American Circus about to start on the road.

"Our backer to-morrow," he said to himself. "I want to see this Harold Hart. I'll drop into the 'Herald' office and see if there's anything for me."

Within a minute he held three letters in his hand, and drawing back a little he selected one and tore it open.

The next instant he started and flushed:

"If you really mean business meet me in Room 'D,' No. — Hester Street, at four p. m. to-morrow, the 23d.

Climax."

Joe Vincent looked up and tried to smile.

"I'll know my doom at that hour," he said, folding the letter.



## CHAPTER II.

## A TERRIBLE DOOM.

The young acrobat walked home in a reflective mood.

The other two letters he left unopened in his pocket, but in his little room he read the first again.

"I would go and see if he was in now, but I wouldn't be carrying out his wishes," he said aloud. "To-morrow at four isn't very long to wait, and I'll not bother him before."

The reply which the young man had received at the newspaper office referred to the following advertisement which he had left there the night before:

"Wanted, a partner with some capital. Business not risky, but good, cool-headed man needed. Partner must have a good knowledge of the world, and be discerning and quick. Nerve."

When Joe thought of the other mis-sives reposing in his pocket unread he took them out and opened them.

The first he threw aside with a laugh, but the second he read twice.

"A little too anxious, and wants to know just what the business is by mail. I can't do that," said Joe, the acrobat, and then he threw the letter into the fire with its companion. "I'll stick to 'Climax.' He doesn't mince matters and choose his words. I'll try him to-morrow afternoon."

Meantime, in another part of the city, the first shadows of a deep mystery were falling.

Harold Hart, the eccentric moneybags, sat alone in a sumptuously appointed room in the "L" of his elegant residence; toying with his gold-rimmed glasses, while a man in a chair near his desk was talking in a low voice.

Harold Hart was just sixty.

He had about him the look of the old beau or sport, and he had been both in his time.

He had amassed a large fortune, partly through his business tact, and partly by rare good luck, and if he was sixty he did not look it, for time had dealt gently with the old habitue of the tracks.

His visitor was a little man with contracted shoulders and deep-set eyes.

He moved his hands rapidly while he talked, and his eyes got a singular light as they regarded Hart.

"I can't just see through your scheme," said the millionaire. "There may be something in it—"

"But you must!" cried the other, rising partly in his chair and fixing upon Hart a glance that seemed to startle him. The old man smiled.

"Not quite so fast, Nathan Moneybox," said he, reprovingly.

"But you must, I say. Without a start I go down to the gutter. I've invested my all in the venture."

"How much was that?"

"A good deal to me."

"Who never had much."

The little man's eyes flashed.

For half a minute he glared at Harold Hart like a cornered tiger or a teased rattlesnake, and then he laid his hand on the table.

This hand had but three fingers.

One of these boasted of a scar that ran the whole length of it and ended only where there was no more finger for it to appear on.

Hart glanced at the hand and then up into the face of its owner.

"Go on," he said. "You were going to speak."

"I will. I say you must help me or by the heavens above us, I'll peach."

The words came from the little man in quick succession and like the snapping of whips.

The millionaire only looked across the table and then smiled.

"You think I don't know anything?" cried Nathan Moneybox.

"I didn't say so."

"No; you know better."

"Well, how much do you want?"

The small man started. He was about

to win. Harold Hart was yielding; he had frightened him.

"It'll take only ten thousand," said he promptly, as if he had decided on the amount some time before.

"Is that all you want?" asked Hart.

"Yes."

"You're not very hard on me."

"Not when you have your millions at your call day and night."

"Men lie on me."

"They do, eh?" and the little man laughed. "You don't deny that you're rich?"

"I won't starve."

"I should say not," ejaculated the other, and then he watched Hart as he rose and slowly crossed the room.

In one corner of the apartment stood a large safe, the doors of which were elegantly painted.

Nathan Moneybox had seen it before. In fact, it was the first thing his greedy eyes had ferreted out in the room, and he wondered how much it held.

"Ten thousand," said Hart, glancing at his visitor. "You won't come back for more, eh?"

"No, that will put me on my feet again, and from to-night I will take a new start."

Harold Hart stepped to the hall and looked out. He glanced up the stairs there and then turned back into the library.

Nathan Moneybox was still looking at the treasure house belonging to the millionaire, and the steps of Harold Hart roused him.

"Check or cash, Nathan?" asked Hart.

"Cash, if it's all the same to you."

Hart opened the safe, swinging back the strong doors with startling ease, and then he beckoned his visitor forward.

Nathan Moneybox stepped forward.

"I want you to see if I'm as rich as they make me out," smiled the retired sport. "When you have robbed me of the ten thousand you can see what you have left."

There was a large space in the safe, almost large enough for a man like Nathan Moneybox to stand erect there.

He did not catch the sudden, basilisk glitter of the eyes that watched him.

He did not look at the white face of the old sport, nor note the eagerness with which he watched him approach the treasure box.

"A little closer, Nathan. You can't see all I want to show you," said Hart.

Nathan Moneybox forgot all about danger in his desire to inspect the interior of the safe.

He bent forward and was right in front of the door. He saw a deep recess, and beyond it little iron doors and drawers. But no money, not a single note.

"Cash, did you say, Nathan?" cried Hart, as his long hand fell suddenly upon his visitor's collar. "I'll let you count it for yourself. Ha, ha, ha. You can count money, can't you?"

Then, and not till then, did the little man scent danger. When he was in the paws of the lion he saw that he was in the shadow of death.

Harold Hart dragged his caller still closer to the open safe; he pushed him across the threshold, showing wonderful strength for one of his years.

Nathan pulled back, but as well might he have tried to break from the jaws of a steel vise.

"I'll let you do the counting, friend Nathan," laughed Hart, mercilessly. "You came for ten thousand dollars, you'll find ten times ten thousand in the safe, which shall become your grave."

Into the safe was Nathan pushed despite his struggles. He could not escape immurement, for he was in the hands of a madman, and his tongue seemed pasted to the roof of his mouth, and terror froze his very blood.

With a cry which was little more than a groan he was jammed against the iron drawers and the great steel portal of the safe was swung shut.

"Help! help!" wailed the imprisoned man, but a heartless laugh was all the answer he received.

He was held against the drawers, and the door of the safe shut upon him.

No cry, no sound came from beyond the portals after they were closed.

Harold Hart went back to his desk.

He sat down and picked up a pen, which he dipped into a cut-glass ink-stand.

Only once did he glance toward the safe, and then he quickly looked away.

For five minutes he wrote rapidly and without looking up. He covered a sheet of legal cap closely written and sealed it with some crimson wax which he took from the desk.

In another instant the door leading into the hall opened and a young girl looked into the room.

Their eyes met.

"It was a false alarm," said the girl at the door. "I thought something had happened to you."

"To me, Floss? No, indeed—not to me," and the girl did not catch the hidden meaning in Harold Hart's reply.

She shut the door, but immediately rapped on it.

"You're going to bed soon, aren't you?" she asked from the other side of the hall door.

"In a few minutes, pet," was the response, and then footsteps went up the stairs.

The old beau's ward entered her room and drew a chair to the table.

She had heard strange noises in the library, which was directly beneath her room, and she had heard some one utter the word "help" once at least.

It was this which had startled her before and taken her down stairs.

But Harold Hart was safe and well. After all, she must have fallen into a doze, and while in that state dreamed the whole thing.

"I'll wait till I hear him go to his room," thought the girl. "He is acting strangely of late, and, besides, he is backing these men in a manner I don't like."

Floss opened a novel and read until her eyes grew heavy.

She could not keep awake, and throwing down the book, she went to the door and looked down over the banisters.

There was a light in the library and voices.

Once she thought of going down and investigating, but thinking that her guardian had a special visitor connected with the Great American Circus, which Harold Hart was putting on the road, she retired to her apartment and went to bed.

She slept soundly and for some hours with nothing to disturb her.

When she awoke the first streaks of day were shining into her room, and she recalled the events of the past night.

The girl, who was not handsome, though the possessor of a strong face gifted with good looks, went to the door and listened with it slightly ajar.

All at once she heard a scream that nearly lifted her off her feet.

"Help! help! There's murder done!" rang out the cry which came up the stairs.

Floss sprang to the head of the flight and looked down.

She saw that the library door was opened, and that in front of it stood a tall, willowy girl, with the whitest of faces and terror-stricken.

It was Nevis, the housemaid.

In there! in there!" shrieked the tall girl, when she caught sight of Floss overhead, and at the same time she pointed into the library. "He's been murdered, killed by some assassin in the night."

Floss went down the flight faster than she had ever descended those steps.

Nevis grasped her arm, and pushed her forward across the library's threshold.

"Look! you can see for yourself!" cried the maid.



Floss went down the flight faster than forward, she saw more than the outlines of the dread thing on the carpet—she saw the doubled-up figure of Harold Hart and the unmistakable signs of murder.

### CHAPTER III.

#### SPANGLES.

Joe Vincent, the acrobat, slept well enough that night and early the next morning he was on the street seeking his breakfast a short distance from his lodgings.

He recalled the actions of George Farrell and Gopher the preceding night, and while he drank his coffee he wondered what they had done toward helping the Great American Circus on its way.

Of course, during his breakfast he thought of Harold Hart, the mysterious backer, and how the two worthies were bleeding the old millionaire sport.

A morning paper lay within reach of his hands, but he did not pick it up.

He therefore missed a vivid account of the finding of the millionaire dead in his room, with certain signs of murder all around him.

If Joe had picked up the newspaper he might have missed the best part of his breakfast and have quitted the little cafe sooner than he intended.

He went up to the room where he practiced on the horizontal bar and went through with his morning work there. He was not disturbed, and, having some hours before him, he sauntered away smoking a cigar and taking his ease.

When he met George, according to the terms of the separation the previous night, that worthy did not say anything startling, and when they parted again it was with assurance that the circus was coming on in great shape, and would startle the show world in due time.

Vincent was extremely anxious to meet the person who had answered his advertisement, and a few minutes before the hour he turned in to Hester Street.

The number was not hard to find, and Joe rang the bell with a good deal of impatience.

The portal was opened by a woman, and, asked to be shown to room "D," he was directed, and presently stood at the fateful door.

The young acrobat did not have to wait long for a summons to enter, for immediately after his knocks he was told to push the door open and cross the threshold, which he did.

The next instant Joe Vincent stood startled in the middle of a plainly-furnished apartment, and his eyes seemed to bulge from his head.

A man several years his senior had risen from a chair, and was laughing as he held out his hands.

"So you're the chap who tolled me into this meeting?" cried Joe, when he found his tongue. "I didn't recognize your handwriting nor did I dream of you at all."

"Of course not," laughed the other. "I'm glad it's you, Joe, for there's nobody I'd sooner help than you."

The two men shook hands, and Joe was waved to a chair, which he took.

"This is a surprise, Spangles," said he. "I never thought of finding you when I put my 'personal' in the paper. Fact is, I'm almost ashamed of what I've done."

"No, that's all right, Joe. I might have heard of you a little later on, but now that you're here, why, we can compare notes. What are you doing?"

"What you said I would do some time—practicing on the trapeze and doing a little bare-back."

"Like your father before you."

Joe Vincent started.

"Pardon me, Joe," cried Spangles. "I didn't intend hurting your feelings, but you know I once told you that I believed your father was at one time connected with the profession, and—"

"I remember, Spangles! I am follow-

ing in his footsteps then, for I'm connected with the Great American Circus."

"It's a new one, isn't it, Joe?"

"Yes," answered the acrobat. "You may have heard something of the projectors—Farrell and Goldstar."

Spangles leaned toward Joe, and for a moment looked him in the face silently.

"Do you mean George Farrell?" he slowly asked.

"That's his name, known as Gentleman George, the Showman Sport."

"I've heard of him. When did he come here?"

"I can't say. He's in with Goldstar, and they've got the Great American fairly on its feet, and, with plenty of money behind them, why, they're liable to make it go."

"Plenty of money? Who's backing the aggregation, Joe?"

"A mysterious friend, I believe."

"A no-name friend, eh?"

"He has a name, of course, but I never knew it till last night. I have been puzzled over the unknown for some time, but last night I happened to run across a bit of luck, and now I know something about the moneybags behind us."

"Well? I would like myself to know just who's backing that precious pair?"

"His name is Hart—Harold Hart, the somewhat eccentric money-bug who is known for doing a good many strange things."

Spangles leaned back in his chair and looked steadily at his companion for a full minute.

"You haven't heard of it, then?" he asked.

"Heard of what?"

"The death—the crime—the strange and diabolical mystery which so far is too dark for the police of Gotham!"

The breathless acrobat shook his head.

"I have heard nothing," he said as he watched Spangles.

"Well, the Great American is liable to be stranded right here in New York. Its backer is dead."

"Harold Hart?"

"Yes, he was murdered last night. His ward, Floss, and the maid, found him. I haven't been up there yet, but I'm going."

"Did you know him, Spangles?"

"I've seen the man, and I know something about his acts. A queer man, an old racer, and, in early life, a circus rider."

"I never knew that of him."

"But it's a fact. He followed the races and the shows. He liked both; the latter, however, held him the tightest, and he went so far as to become part owner of a little circus which traveled through Pennsylvania, and did considerable business. But afterward he came to New York, struck a streak of luck, went into Wall Street and—you know the rest, Joe."

Joe Vincent did not speak for a little while.

"It may change the plans for the Great American. We have everything in readiness, were about to start out, had the property purchased and the day of delivery set. I don't care if it does alter our plans, now that I've found you again, Spangles. What are you doing?"

A singular look came into Spangles' eyes.

"I'm doing nothing in particular just now," he answered, evasively. "But, let me become 'Climax' again, and you 'Nerve,' and get down to business. You got my letter and you want a partner in a 'risky business.' Well, Joe, I'm ready."

"But, hang it all, it seems so strange, my meeting with you, and the outcome of my 'personal.' I don't believe I'll state the matter. It might sound foolish to you, Spangles."

"Go ahead. I won't be Spangles again till we're through with the other matter. Remember, I'm 'Climax.' Go ahead, Joe. What was the risky business?"

The young acrobat pulled his chair

forward until he could lay his hand on his companion's arm.

For a moment the two friends thus singularly brought together looked at one another, and then Joe Vincent said:

"I want to find my father. That's the risky business."

"Is that all?"

"All? Isn't that a good deal?" cried Joe.

"I'll admit that it's something of a mystery—a good deal of a mystery. Why do you want to find this out?"

"Because I want to prove that what George Farrell said to me in a tiff the other day is a lie."

The speaker's cheeks flushed with indignation and for a second the flush did not vanish.

"What did he say?" asked Spangles.

"He said that I was a child of the gutter, and that I got my suppleness there."

"The scoundrel!" cried Spangles.

"My first impulse was to fly at his throat and pin him to the wall. I had a fair chance at him, for we were alone in our practice room; but all at once the door opened and Goldstar came in. This served to cool my anger, and it saved George a torn throat, if nothing more, for I would have mashed his dark face against the papering."

"I wish you had, although you would have lost your job with the Great American."

"I would have surrendered it gladly to have had the pleasure of blacking the rascal's eyes! I'll quit it yet. The thought of his insulting remarks maddens me when I think of it."

Spangles said nothing in reply, but looked across the room, permitting his gaze to wander to the opposite side of the street, where the first shadows of night were already gathering.

"I want to know," suddenly continued Joe, the young acrobat, "if that remark is true. I want to know it, and if a lie—and I believe it is one—I must know it, so as to fling the insult back into its maker's face with a pair of fists behind it."

"Why did you say that your business was 'risky'?"

"I believe there are people who don't want me to solve this family mystery. Then, it will take some money, but I'm willing to throw into the hunt my salary and all my energies. Not long ago some papers, which I thought might throw some light upon the past, were stolen from my room, and I never picked up a clew to the robber."

"There is some mystery here," said Spangles. "I'm with you, Joe. You can count on Spangles. I have some money, and can get help in that direction if I need it."

"That's good. You're a god-send, Spangles. I'll never forget you," and Joe would have grasped his friend's hands if they had not been quietly but firmly withdrawn. "I'll quit the circus, and we'll devote our whole time to this search."

"Do nothing of the kind," broke in Spangles. "Stay right where you are. I don't doubt your ability to make a first-class acrobat—"

"They call me that now," said Joe, proudly.

"So much the better. You see, you will soon make a name not only for yourself, but for the circus. Now, Joe, I'm Spangles again, and if you'll go with me, we'll investigate this murder on Twenty-eighth Street."

"The murder of Harold Hart?"

"Yes."

"I can't stand such things, Spangles—never could," said Joe Vincent. "By and by I'll get a little more nerve, but if nerve is needed in this search of ours, why, you can count on me. It's to be the effort of my life."

Spangles rose and went to the window.

Joe saw him look down into the street, and for some time watched him closely.



Spangles suddenly turned and came back.

"What day do you start?" he asked.

"I heard Gentleman George say that within a week we'd be on the road with colors flying."

"You are likely to go very soon."

"I can't see how, if our backer is dead."

"Oh, that makes no difference. How would you like to have me go along, Joe?"

Joe Vincent uttered a cry of delight.

"The very thing! I'll speak to the managers about a place for you!" he exclaimed.

"Not on your life," said Spangles, solemnly. "Say nothing to them about me. I may be with you all the same, Joe. I like life on the road. I know a few old tricks in circus life which I can improve on and make a hit. Silence now. Meet me to-morrow at nine in this room. Remember, I am 'Climax' in one sense, but to you always, Joe, I am Spangles. I am Spangles, the Spotter—"

"Great heavens! the truth is out at last."

"Yes, but the secret is ours as yet. I am going to grapple this new mystery of murder—the puzzle on Twenty-eighth Street."

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### THE MAN IN THE SAFE.

Meantime, in the home of the eccentric man known as Harold Hart there was mystery and consternation.

The finding of the dead body on the floor first by Nevis, the maid, and then by Floss had spread rapidly, and the police had carried it first to headquarters and thence to the newspapers.

It was murder!

There was no doubting this, for the signs of crime were so plentiful that the dullest man-hunter need not withhold his opinion for an instant.

In the little room she occupied on the second floor stood the determined-looking girl called "Old Hart's angel."

Floss was alone, and it was the morning after the crime.

She could hear voices on the floor below, but she did not appear to listen.

She knew that detectives were at work, that strange men were in the house, men who had never entered it before that day, and she knew, too, that the reporter was inquiring into everything he could find with all the ardor of the eager ferret.

It was a long forenoon to Floss.

She had told her story half a dozen times, and had retired to her room, leaving orders with Nevis that she was not in to the inquisitive any longer.

By and by the house became still, to be stared at by passers-by and to become an object of interest to all on the street.

It was nearly five in the afternoon when Floss heard Nevis's footsteps on the stairs.

The tall maid came to the door and rapped lightly.

Floss opened it and looked at the card which the maid extended.

"Where is the owner of the card, Nevis?" she asked.

"In the parlor."

"What is he like?"

"He's a young man, good-looking, as men go, but to me he looks more like a sport than a detective, but, then, I really don't know."

Floss glanced at the card again, and, under her breath, read the name it contained—"Cyrus Spangles."

"I'll see him, Nevis," she said, whereupon the maid withdrew and glided away.

Floss made very little preparation to meet the man who awaited her in the parlor, and in a few minutes she opened the door below and appeared to her visitor.

She stood face to face with a man who rose as the door opened, and she

felt that this person was Cyrus Spangles, the owner of the card.

He stepped forward quickly and threw a swift glance toward the door which led into the hall, and opposite which was the portal of the library, the scene of the tragedy.

"I am Cyrus Spangles, miss," said he. "I am not here to disturb you, but I am here to find, if I can, a clew to this horrid catastrophe."

"Another detective?" said Floss.

"You may call me that, though I am not connected with any particular agency."

"An independent, I presume. I have been interviewed by several since the discovery, but I do not see why I should refuse to give you the particulars as I know them."

"I am not here for that. I read your story in the newspapers, and I suppose you have been correctly reported."

"In those I looked over my story was not mutilated," smiled Floss, and then she waited for Spangles to proceed.

"Would you mind letting me look at the room?" he asked.

"Come," she said. "He is not there now. They have taken him into another part of the house, but the furniture has not been moved in the library."

Floss led the way from the parlor across the hall and into the darkened room where the crime had been committed.

"It was here," she said, waving her hand toward the desk as she turned upon the young detective. "Just what took place here last night is known only to one living person, the assassin."

"You incline to the opinion that there was but one?"

"Really, I can't say, but I think so."

"What is missing?"

"Nothing."

This laconic answer seemed to stump Spangles.

He glanced at the safe.

"Has it been opened since?" he asked.

"It has not."

"The combination, I suppose, is the dead man's secret."

"I'm not so sure about that," said Floss.

"Do you know it, miss?"

"I do not, but Harold Hart was a queer man in many ways. At one time he was very forgetful, and I have known him to leave the queerest memoranda about the house—at one time he left the combination of his safe in his room."

"When was that?"

"Three months since."

"Did he often change the combination?"

"Not that I know of. He adhered to one, I believe, though, of course, I am not sure."

"The interior of the safe might furnish a clew," said Spangles, looking sharply at Floss. "You say the safe has not been opened since the discovery?"

"That is true. They intend to open it, though. Nevis said the superintendent has given out such orders."

"Then, if we had the proper combination, we could forestall them all."

"I see! I see!" cried the girl, as her eyes got a sudden gleam of coming victory. "I'll look for the little card now. He wrote the combination on a card and kept it at one time in his room."

In another instant Spangles heard her on the stair and then he began to wait for her return.

In less than five minutes he saw the figure of the millionaire's ward bound into the room, and the moment he greeted her he saw a small white card clutched tightly in her hand.

"It was unexpected fortune!" cried Floss. "That is the same card he once used, but then, you see, he may have changed the combination."

"Which is very probably the case," answered Spangles, as he took the card and glanced at the inscription on it.

He smiled at it and walked toward the safe.

"Do you know anything about opening safes, Mr. Spangles?" asked Floss.

"A little, miss," came over the detective's shoulder. "This one may defy us, though," and he stopped and began with the "key" on the card.

Floss, standing near the desk under the electric light, watched him intently and seemed to hold her breath.

Suddenly Spangles looked at her with a glance it was impossible not to interpret.

The girl darted forward.

"You have found it out?" she cried.

"It was the right key, after all."

Spangles nodded slightly.

"How fortunate," and she clasped her hands. "Now, if the safe should give you a clew—"

Spangles had grasped the steel knob of the massive doors and was tugging at it.

Floss scarcely breathed; perhaps, after all, he had failed with the supposed "key."

"They will have to open it by aid of an expert," she was saying, when Spangles pulled the door open and nearly lost his balance in the effort.

The next moment something relieved by the opening door fell out on the mat in front of the safe, and Floss, with a horrified glance at it, recoiled with a cry.

"Merciful heavens! another dead man," she exclaimed, while Spangles, looking down at the thing at his feet, said nothing, but seemed to be thunder-struck.

The light shone full upon the blackened face of the man who had rolled from the safe of steel with his hands torn and clenched and his lips bitten through.

"Who did it? In heaven's name, how came he there?" cried the girl, looking at Spangles. "Is this to be another mystery of murder?"

"Who is he?" asked Spangles. "Have you ever seen this man before, miss?"

Floss moved forward, her gaze riveted on the terrible spectacle on the carpet, and for half a minute of breathless silence she gazed down into the face at her feet.

"It looks like one of his visitors, but he didn't come very often," she said at last.

"What was his name?"

"Harold Hart called him Nathan."

"Nathan what?"

Floss shook her head.

"I don't know. Once I heard him call this man Nathan—it was in the hall six months ago. They stood face to face like enemies, but I never asked Harold Hart why it was so. But he was in there—dead!"

"Yes, crushed between the iron drawers of the safe and the big door. It must have taken a powerful man to have pushed him in there against his will."

Floss shuddered.

"He was very strong," she said, in low tones.

"Who? Harold Hart?"

Floss seemed to catch at once the terrible inference that was to be drawn from her words and paled.

"I don't accuse him," cried she. "Mind you, Cyrus Spangles, I don't accuse Harold Hart of crime, but—"

She stopped and again looked down at the dead man on the carpet.

"It's another mystery," said the detective, "and one which silent lips may hold forever."

"Do you think they quarrelled here? Do you think they had an altercation—those two men—and that Harold Hart proved the master?"

"He knew the combination, miss. People who own safes where they keep their valuables don't give away their secrets."

"I understand. Then, that would make him out a murdered as well as crime's victim."

Spangles did not answer her, but went over to the safe and bent forward, examining the dead man's prison.



"The safe is air-tight when the door is shut," he said. "This man had no chance then."

"But he may have been dead when placed in the safe," replied Floss. "He may have died suddenly of heart disease in Harold Hart's presence—"

"But the features, miss! Look at the blackened face and the unmistakable signs of agony. Look at the torn hands and the bitten lips. That man lived a year of torture in that safe after the door was shut, though, in reality, it was all over in less than two minutes."

"It must be so. What keen hunters you men are! You will fasten this crime on Harold Hart. You will make him out a murderer and the public will applaud you. You won't care who killed him."

"That shall become my mission, miss," said Spangles. "I want to know who killed Harold Hart. He may have been justified in shutting that person up in the safe, even admitting that he did it, but I am most interested in the question: Who killed Harold Hart?"

"The dead cannot talk, Mr. Spangles. The lips in yon room are closed forever. The man who killed him holds the secret."

"And that secret shall be wrested from him!"

Floss held out her hands.

"Go and find him," she urged. "All I have is yours, and I am his sole heir, if you solve this mystery—if you avenge the death of Harold Hart. But this body?"

"The police must know everything," decided Spangles. "But not just yet. Leave me alone with this mystery for a little while, miss."

"All night, if you say so," and Floss, with another look at the detective, swept from the library.

Spangles followed her with a scrutinizing gaze.

"She's a strange girl, and there's something magnetic about her. I wonder if Joe ever saw her?"

Then he turned to the safe, stepping over the dead body lying in front of it.

## CHAPTER V.

### SPANGLES JOINS THE SHOW.

Just one hour later Spangles called for Floss, and the young lady made her appearance.

The looks of the detective had not changed, and the girl eyed him closely in hopes of finding out if his search had been successful, but he did not in the least betray himself.

To all appearances he had not disturbed the contents of the safe, the door of which stood open, just as it had when he started back as the dead man rolled from the safe to the carpet.

Floss instinctively glanced at the dead body, and then looked up at Spangles.

"I will notify the authorities," said he. "They will not let it remain here."

"I trust not. You remember that you are to avenge Harold Hart."

"I will not forget, miss."

Floss followed the detective into the hall, and thence to the door, where she bade him good-night, and in a little while Cy Spangles was on the street again.

He first notified the proper authorities of the new mystery in the millionaire's mansion, and then vanished.

Half an hour later he turned up at a door, where he rapped.

"What! you, Cy?" cried the young man who opened the door, and who stood looking at him with genuine curiosity. "I was not to meet you again till to-morrow, but I have news for you. Come in."

Joe Vincent waited till his friend Spangles had entered the little room where he lodged, and then he turned on him eagerly.

"We are going out sooner than we expected."

"On the road, Joe?"

"Yes. Something has changed the

plans of the management, and we are to start day after to-morrow. George says everything is so nearly ready that we can get off then, and they have decided to go."

"But the dates, Joe?"

"Oh, as to that, we shall open in another town from the one selected and billed. George has telegraphed ahead."

The detective seemed thunderstruck over this change of plans, but he quickly said:

"I would go with you, Joe, if you had a place for me."

"We have a place! If you can ride bare-back—"

"Can't I?" laughed Spangles. "You don't know what all I've been doing since I saw you last, Joe. Ride bare-back? Look at this old relic."

Spangles drew from his pocket-book a bit of folded newspaper and handed it to Vincent.

It was a rural notice of a circus, and praised the bare-back riding of "Signor Mantelli."

Joe looked up with a smile.

"You're Mantelli, aren't you," he said.

"Yes. I passed then as Mantelli, the champion bare-back rider of the Royal Italian Circus. I'm a little out of practice, for that was five years ago, but it won't take long to get me in trim."

"Come with me. We'll see them to-night."

Vincent picked up his hat, but the hand of Spangles touched his arm.

"No doubt you wonder at my eagerness to become a part of the Great American Circus?" said he.

"I do, but I'm not asking any questions. I'm content to have you with me on the road, Cy."

"All right. Silence is golden, they say, but I won't always keep the secret from you, Joe."

"To the management then. They have advertised for a new rider, but intended to start out without him. They all seem to be engaged, and you'll just fill the bill."

"Wait a moment. Did you ever see anything like this?"

Spangles, who had again dived into his pocket, produced an old-fashioned leather pocket-book, at sight of which Joe uttered a sharp cry.

"My papers were in just such a pocket-book like that. Let me see. I know some private marks on it, and if it is mine—Here they are, Cy! This is the pocket-book that contained the valuable papers when I missed them. Where are they?"

The eyes of the two friends met.

"I can only show you the pocket-book at present," said Spangles.

"Then, it did not contain the papers?"

"Not when I found it."

"That is bad. Perhaps the thief destroyed them."

That is to be determined by another and better search. He may have kept them, for they must have been of some importance to him."

"Yes, yes. But I leave that to your cunning. Find the papers and that will be the first step on our trail. I don't ask you to tell me where you found the pocket-book. I dare not."

Vincent's face was quite white, and the detective turned his own away, nor did he look at him for a minute.

"To George Farrell now," said Joe. "I want him to see Signor Mantelli. We are not close friends, of course. I accidentally ran across you. Won't that do?"

"The plan exactly," laughed Spangles, and the friends left the room together.

A few minutes, guided by Joe, brought Spangles to a two-story house, shaded during the afternoon by several trees, and in response to Vincent's ring the door was opened by a man wearing a smoking cap.

It was George Farrell.

Gentleman George smiled the moment he noticed Joe, but his eyes got another light the instant he noticed Spangles.

"This gentleman is Signor Mantelli, the king of bare-back riders and hurdlers," said Joe, presenting Spangles. "I came across him accidentally, and, as he is out of a job, I thought I would fetch him round and see if he wouldn't prove an attraction to the Great American."

The keen, deep-set eyes of the Showman Sport were already taking in the detective's anatomy, and in another minute he had opened the door of a room to the right of the hall, saying:

"We're all here, so we'll discuss the matter in open court, Signor. Step in."

Into the well-lighted apartment stepped Spangles and stood face to face with a dark-faced but handsome man, whom he guessed was Gopher Goldstar.

"Signor Mantelli," said Farrell, with a wave of the hand. "Out of a job, ran across Joe on the street, and they talked shop, of course. The Signor has been in the profession for some years. I think I have heard of him."

"He's got recommendations in his pocket," put in Joe. "Show them your notices, Signor."

The bogus Italian produced the newspaper clipping, and Goldstar, donning his gold-rimmed glasses, read it carefully.

"It gives you a good send-off, sir," he commented, looking up. "Do you want a job?"

Mantelli bowed.

"There happens to be just one opening in the Great American," resumed Goldstar. "If we can agree on the salary—"

"Don't let that bother you. I want to keep in practice and salary is no object. This gentleman," nodding to Joe, "tells me that you will go out day after to-morrow. That will suit me."

Mantelli looked round the room while the two magnates of circusdom consulted in low tones, and presently Goldstar said:

"The place is yours. Just now we can't determine on the amount of salary to offer you. We suggest that it depends on the business we do."

"An excellent suggestion," answered Spangles.

"Take care of the new star, Joe," said Farrell. "See that he doesn't get away between now and the time we start," and both managers laughed.

"Didn't I tell you I'd get you in, Spangles?" cried the delighted Vincent, as they left the little house together. "They're not cherubs, as you can see at a glance, but they're shrewd and cool-headed—just the sort of fellows to make it go. But, with the backer dead, murdered, as you say, I don't see where the money is to come from. They know, no doubt, or else they wouldn't be ready to go out in so short a time."

Spangles and Joe walked away together, and at a certain corner the former touched his companion's arm.

"I suppose they're talking over their new acquisition," said he, a twinkle of merriment in his eyes. "Farrell has changed very little, but Goldstar's face has grown considerably darker."

"Heavens! do you know those men?" cried Vincent.

"I've heard of the pair. This is somewhat of a new role for them, but they're up to all sorts of things and schemes. Wait for me here a moment, Joe."

Leaving Vincent on the corner, Spangles hastened away, and entering a hallway, ran up a flight of stairs, and burst into a small room fitted like a telegraph office.

A young man sat at the table reading between messages, but at Spangles's entrance he laid down the book and waited for work.

Spangles drew toward him a yellow blank, and wrote a brief message, which he handed to the operator.

It was acipher message, as the young man saw at a glance, but he did not remark upon it. He sat down and sent it while Spangles waited.

"Expect a reply?" was all he said, as Spangles paid for the telegram.



"No reply expected," and the sender of the cipher message turned and walked out.

In another moment he was on the street, and rejoined Vincent, who seemed not to have stirred an inch since he left him.

They resumed their tramp together, and during the walk, Spangles narrated the story of his visit to Harold Hart's house, and the startling episode of the dead man in the steel safe.

"In God's name, how came he there?" cried Joe, looking at Spangles with wide open eyes.

"What would you say after hearing about the crime?"

"I'd say—but it's a terrible accusation—I'd be compelled to say that Harold Hart found that he had a dangerous guest and deliberately thrust him into the safe."

"It looks that way."

"It looks no other way," said Joe. "Unless the man who killed Harold Hart was suddenly confronted by this stranger, and, in order to silence a witness, landed him where you found him."

"But no one but Harold Hart knew the combination."

Joe nodded.

"I see. That does away with my theory. Harold Hart could tell the story of the dead man in his safe."

"But he never will unless he left behind a confession, which, as yet, has not been found."

"And Floss heard nothing?"

"Nothing that gives a clew."

Joe was silent.

"Did you ever see this girl, Joe?" suddenly asked Spangles.

"Once."

"Where?"

"In the park. I stopped her horse in time to prevent an accident to her."

"When was that?"

"Oh, six months ago."

"Did you know at the time who she was?"

"No."

"How did she impress you?"

"I felt a thrill run over me when our eyes met. She isn't a beauty, Spangles, but there is something magnetic about the girl. She actually caused me to start—froze my blood, as it were, and before I fully recovered she was gone."

"Did she tell you who she was?"

"No, one of the bystanders did. He said she was as eccentric as her guardian, old Hart. By Jove! at the time I thought she was. She's sole heiress now, and if Gopher captures her and gets hold of the money-bags, why, they'll have enough to run the Great American during two seasons of failure. But if she don't chime in with them, there's likely to be a time."

"Yes," said Spangles, lowering his voice. "This strange, cold girl is almost as much of a mystery as the two already in her house. But the Great American will reveal all or nothing, Joe. Time will tell."

#### CHAPTER VI.

##### A PLAY NOT ON THE BILLS.

One week later, in a small city in the heart of Pennsylvania, a large tent might have been seen pitched in a meadow.

The streamers flying over the canvas bore the letters "G. A. C.," which the initiated knew meant "Great American Circus," which had been fairly launched and which for several days had been playing to good crowds.

Gentleman George and Gopher Goldstar had managed the opening with a good deal of acumen, and their efforts had been crowned with success.

The personnel of the "Great American" was good, as shows of its class go; there were good tumblers, riders and acrobats; the "beauties of the ring" were as pretty as the usual run of such people, and, as a whole, the managers were able to congratulate themselves on the outlook.

The identity of Signor Mantelli had

been faithfully kept by both Joe Vincent and Spangles.

Spangles had proved quite an acquisition to the ring and the "Italian" had won a great deal of applause.

It was the eighth night of the tour, and the lights illuminated the large space under the canvas.

Fairy Flake, the female rider—a fair young girl—had just taken her departure from the ring amid a generous shower of applause and George Farrell stood looking at the crowd that faced him.

Fairview City was a good show town and had good hotels at the best one of which he and Goldstar were domiciled; but just then he was not thinking of the accommodations there.

He heard a voice behind him, and knew it was Goldstar's without turning his head.

"He's on the fourth seat from the top, straight ahead," said his partner. "You'll see him in a moment. There, he moved his hand, threw it up to his hat."

A faint answer came from Farrell's lips.

"I see him now," said he, still looking right ahead. "I see the fellow plainly now."

"Well, that's the man who signalled to Mantelli the moment he entered the ring awhile ago. I was watching the Signor very closely, and when he raised his hand and shot a glance in that man's direction, I looked that way, too. It was all over in a flash, but they weren't quick enough to deceive me."

The Showman Sport continued to regard the man on the seat for a moment longer, when he turned to look at a couple of acrobats, the Turner Brothers, who had just bounded upon the sawdust.

"Watch him like a hawk, and when the performance is over, why, watch him still," he said in a whisper to Goldstar.

"On my life," answered the dark-faced man. "He is here for a purpose. Mantelli may be a rascal, a wolf in sheep's clothing. If he is, he may regret that he ever came into the world."

The man so closely observed by both Farrell and Goldstar was a person of fifty and not very well dressed.

Indeed, he looked very much like a common farmer, his beard of rural cut and his garments going to show that he did not belong to the business side of Fairview life.

If he was not a farmer he was certainly a miner, and the two managers of the Great American did not know just which to style him.

The circus was not marred by any unpleasant incident, the performers going through their parts to the satisfaction of all, and at last, the last whip cracked and the last rider retired.

The crowd rose and surged toward the opening in the tent.

It was an orderly crowd, no one jostled his neighbor and all were in genuine good humor.

"Where is he?" asked Goldstar, coming up to his partner, who was trying to keep track of some one in the crowd.

"Over there. No, by Jove, he's gone!"

"That's bad. I told you to watch him."

"I thought I had him pat, but, I've lost him. But, hold on. A man of his build and dress can't be lost long in a little place like this. Where's Mantelli?"

"In the dressing room talking with Fairy."

"Well, I'll keep track of the other one. He's here for mischief; he looks too much like a certain person, and we can't afford to let him get away."

Glancing into the little tent behind the main one, George Farrell hurried toward the door of the canvas and sought to get sight of the stranger again.

He was very eager, but was disappointed, for the crowd filed out, leaving him biting his lips in vexation.

"Hang it all, it won't do to let him give us the slip altogether. If Mantelli did signal him—if they know one another—there's bad work here," and he ran outside and tried to find his quarry in the scattered groups on the show ground.

All at once the Showman Sport caught sight of a stationary figure on his right where the tent ropes were; and in another moment he had stepped thither.

The figure observed did not move, and the manager saw that the man had not seen him.

"That's the fellow," said Gentleman George under his breath. "He may be waiting for Mantelli. I'm in luck. If I can only overhear, then it will be nuts for us. I could do it inside against the canvas, for the conversation is doubtless to be held where the fellow is, and—I'll try it if I can escape Mantelli's eye."

He looked again at the man near the canvas, and that moment saw him move.

He came straight toward Farrell, and the well-dressed partner resolved to stand his ground.

The stranger loomed up larger than ever as he came on, and in a second he seemed to have reached the stature of a giant.

The men came face to face where the light happened to reveal Farrell to the stranger, and in a second the hand of the self-styled farmer fell upon the manager's shoulder.

Gentleman George recoiled as the hand touched him, and the fingers seemed to sink beneath his clothes.

"You're Farrell, I believe," said the stranger in a harsh voice. "You're George Farrell of the Great American. Seems to me you're in luck."

Farrell resented the words with a glowering look, but the speaker was not discomfited thereby. He only seemed to give a shrug and to eye the manager more fiercely than before.

Gentleman George had been backed up against the canvas, and a little push would throw him off his feet.

"You don't know me," continued the stranger. "I saw both you and your pard eyeing me like two chicken hawks, and from the way you did it you ought to know me in the dark."

He chuckled a little at the end of his sentence, but Farrell did not enjoy the joke.

"I don't know you," said he, "and I can't say that we paid particular attention to you—"

"Come, don't deny it, Farrell; but that's all right. Under the circumstances you thought you had a right to look me through, for I haven't been to a show in twenty years."

"I can't help that, you know, Mr. —"

"You may call me Fontenoy—Jack Fontenoy—though that isn't my name. One name's as good as another just now. I have a little business with you."

"With my partner, too, I suppose?"

"No, sir, with you, and you alone," was the stern answer, and suddenly the hand of Jack Fontenoy was transferred from Farrell's shoulder to his throat, where the fingers seemed to close like the talons of a bird of prey.

"I won't detain you very long. Just long enough to put a few questions."

The Showman Sport recoiled, but the hand held him fast.

He glanced toward the ground and saw that Fontenoy held something in his left hand—something dark, like a miniature case.

"Go on, then; but remember that my time is limited," he growled.

"So's mine. Never mind that. We won't quarrel over the time. Now, Farrell, where's Lucy?"

"Lucy," came suddenly from the manager's lips, and he gave Fontenoy a wild glance. "I don't know anything about a Lucy."

"You don't, eh? Come, now. Don't lie to me—of all men. I mean the old Lucy—the little one who fell in love with you."



For the first time Gentleman George appeared to smile, but the attempt was a failure.

"What ever became of her?" continued Fontenoy.

The other man grew dark in the face and maliciously showed his teeth like a tiger.

"In the first place, what's that to you?" he demanded.

"A good deal, and to others, too. It's your secret kept pretty well, but you've got to out with it now."

"Do you expect me to be threatened into making a disclosure. I'll show you that Farrell is no coward."

"Very well, that's just what I want. Look at this picture first. There's light enough for that. Do you recognize the face in the old case?"

The left hand of Jack Fontenoy came up, and the miniature case snapped open in the manager's face.

"Look at her. You know the face, don't you? I haven't had the satisfaction of facing you for years, but I knew you were coming, and so I tarried here."

Farrell glanced madly at the portrait, and then shut his lips hard.

As Jack Fontenoy's hand fell the picture vanished and the hand came up again empty.

"You haven't answered my question," said Fontenoy.

"I don't have to."

"I'll kill you where you stand!" hissed the so-called farmer. "I am here for the secret or blood."

Just then footsteps were heard approaching, and as both Farrell and Fontenoy glanced to the right they beheld the outlines of Gopher Goldstar within ten feet of the spot.

Farrell's heart leaped for joy in his bosom, and he saw the face of Fontenoy grow desperate.

"Stand off there!" he cried to Gopher, who stopped the moment he saw the situation.

The Showman Sport looked appealingly at his partner, and saw Gopher draw a revolver, which was gripped in a dark hand as the latter came up.

"If you fire," cried Fontenoy, "you'll be without a partner. This is a game for more than one."

Goldstar stepped toward the pair and then leaned toward the canvas.

"Don't mind me," cried Farrell. "Kill him in his tracks, Gopher."

At that moment there was a quick movement on Jack Fontenoy's part and the sharp report of Goldstar's six-shooter was heard.

Gentleman George staggered against the canvas, which swayed and let him almost inside, while Jack Fontenoy covered the ground between him and Goldstar with the agility of a practiced acrobat.

Gopher felt a hand at his own throat, and then he was thrown ten feet away as easily as if he were a child.

"I don't want your life now," said Fontenoy. "I wasn't doing business with you, but with your partner. However, it's two of a kind, to all intents and purposes. Some other time, if you interfere again with my affairs, I'll pay attention to you, Gopher, but just now I'm dealing with your partner."

Goldstar was left to recover as best he could, while Fontenoy, after eyeing him a moment, turned and coolly walked away.

"Hold on!" said a sharp voice behind him. "You want to see me, do you? I'm here—ready to answer every question you put."

Jack Fontenoy looked around and saw coming toward him the enraged Farrell, his eyes fairly blazing and his clothes soiled from their contact with the ground.

"You must not, George. Let the scoundrel go," and Gopher Goldstar leaped toward his partner and pushed him back. "We know him now, and he's harmless."

"Harmless?" laughed the country

Ajax, surveying the pair contemptuously. "If you call a cyclone harmless, you're the biggest fools on the road today. Good-night, gentlemen. We'll meet again, and when you least expect," and, rounding a sharp angle in the tent, he vanished as suddenly as if the ground had swallowed him.

## CHAPTER VII.

### A BIT OF NIGHT BUSINESS.

The Showman Sport and his partner glared after the man till he was out of sight, and then for a second they did not speak, although they looked at one another in the light that fell upon them.

"He's a tiger," said Gentleman George at last.

"A regular tempest," answered Gopher Goldstar. "How did he get you in his clutches?"

"Sprang upon me unawares, like a wild beast."

"Without giving you time to draw, eh?"

"Exactly. He came down upon me like a thunderbolt, and the first thing I knew I was in his power."

"I don't see how I missed him. Of course, it was a hasty shot, but I don't usually miss men at that distance."

"I know you don't. I heard the whizz of the bullet. It must have struck the tree over there."

The two men walked slowly back into the tent, the lights of which had nearly all disappeared, and in a few minutes they were not to be seen.

Leaving the hands to take down and pack the canvas for the night journey to the next town, George and Gopher adjourned to the hotel and shut themselves up in their room, with a bottle of wine before them.

Their thoughts were not on the success of the day, for the circus had shown to excellent business, but they talked about the sudden swoop of the man called Jack Fontenoy.

"What did he ask you, George?" queried Gopher.

Farrell's eyes grew mad.

"About the old girl—about Lucy."

"The deuce he did! What does that subject have in it for him?"

"I don't know."

"Did he threaten you?"

"Yes. He had her picture in his hand, and he poked it into my face while he made the demand."

"Wanted to know what had become of her, did he?"

"That's it exactly."

Goldstar was silent for a little while, and then his dark, serpent-like face seemed to glide across the table.

"This man means mischief, and if I thought Mantelli was connected with him I'd call the fellow in and let him go."

"No, watch him," said Farrell. "To dismiss him would be to tell him that he is under suspicion."

"You are right. We'll watch this man. Can Joe also have a hand in this business? You know he introduced Mantelli to us?"

"Yes, but Joe seems innocent enough. I don't think he knows anything, but if we should discover that he does, why, we can play a double hand before they get onto us."

"I wish I had kept track of the man after the encounter. He may be lounging about town yet. If I thought he was, I'd go out and run him down."

"Keep away from his iron hand. He has the grip of an eagle and the power of a Hercules."

Goldstar rose and went over to the little window which looked down upon the main street of the Pennsylvania town.

"Come here, George," he said in low tones to his friend, without turning his head.

In an instant Gentleman George was at his friend's side.

"What is it?"

"There's a man against the building across the street—standing in the doorway."

George placed his face against the glass and looked for half a minute without saying a word.

"I see a man there," said he.

"Can it be Fontenoy? If I thought it was, I would be tempted to shoot from here."

"Don't, for heaven's sake! That would only expose the old matter, and we can't afford to be exposed now."

"Nor at any time. I must go to New York to-night; that was determined last night, and I don't want this man after me."

While they looked, with the light behind them turned quite low, they saw the watched man move from the doorway and walk off.

"It doesn't look large enough for him—the figure don't," said George. "It's more like Mantelli."

"Do you think the new rider is playing spy?" and Goldstar's face seemed to grow black as he spoke. "That man must not play spy on us, George. He dies if he tries that!"

"I can't say, but he looks like Mantelli. Can't you see that the man down on the street is about the rider's build?"

"He is, and—wait! I'll see."

"Not to-night. Leave him to me while you're gone. I'll take care of our interests at this end of the line. Only play out your hand in the city, and play it well."

"Trust me for that. Let the man yonder go for the present. I can get out of town at midnight, and, once on the road to New York, I'll lay my plans so that they can't fail."

Goldstar slipped over to the little depot and hid from view among the shadows there.

The place was nearly deserted; no prospective passengers but an old man occupied it, and the manager of the Great American Circus studied him for a little while through the window of the building.

When the train dashed up to the station, Goldstar sprang aboard and snuggled down in the first corner that he encountered. He forgot the old passenger, and did not think of him again.

It was in the small hours of the morning when the manager awoke and looked out upon the landscape.

Gopher had had a good doze, and the other passengers were stretching themselves in the coach.

All at once he gave utterance to a sharp cry of danger, and his hand dived into the inner pocket of his coat.

"Robbed!" he cried. "Robbed while I slept! In the name of heaven, why did I go to sleep? I might have known that a spy was on my track. The man on the street in Fairview City must have followed me. He knew what I carried. He must be on the train still."

Goldstar, white-faced, now rose and felt for his revolver.

"I'll rob him in turn if I catch him," he grated. "He must be still on the train following me to the city. There was the old man I saw last night in the depot. He looked innocent enough, but he may have been the villain."

The passengers who noticed the man's consternation did not speak, but looked on in silence, while Goldstar went down the aisle looking madly at each and all. He left the coach and went back.

One-half of the passengers were still asleep on their cushions; but this did not relax Gopher's vigilance. He eyed all with a savageness born of intense hatred.

Suddenly he stood still near the forward end of the second coach searched. The old man of the depot was before him.

Goldstar looked a moment, and then his hand fell upon the slumberer's shoulder.

He shook the passenger madly.

"Here, I have found you!" he hissed, bending forward and almost touching the old face with his mustache. "You're the man I want."

With a sudden wrench the old man



tore loose from Gopher's grasp and rose resentfully.

"Have a care who you insult," he exclaimed. "I'm a quiet gentleman, entitled to the rights of a person who travels, and you have no right to trouble me."

"But you're the man who got on at Fairview?"

"I am, sir."

"You got on for a certain purpose."

"So I did—I am going to New York."

Gopher was nonplussed for a little while, but he did not allow the cool answers of the passenger to balk him.

He believed that they covered a deep design, and he went on accordingly.

"You've robbed me—plundered me while I slept," he cried. "Hand the plunder over!"

The old man was sitting bolt upright, looking coolly into Gopher's face, and his manners were most perplexing.

"Robbed you?" he cried. "Do I look like a train robber?"

"Never mind that; you robbed me all the same."

"Prove it."

"I can do that by searching you."

The old man threw open his coat and unbuttoned his old-fashioned waistcoat.

"All right, go ahead," said he.

Gopher did not know what to do. He half believed he had made a mistake, and for half a second he relented.

But the deep-set eyes of the passenger and his very coolness told him that he was on the right track.

The old man, whose voice was rather strong for a man of his years, puzzled him.

Catching sight of a pocket on the inside of his vest, Gopher suddenly ran his hand into it and fished up a black leather pocketbook.

"You'll turn robber yourself," said the passenger, as the pocketbook was withdrawn.

It did not take Gopher long to look into the pocketbook, while its owner looked silently on.

The partner handed it back disappointed.

"Do you want my watch?" asked the passenger. "That's the next thing in train robbery, I believe."

By this time the other passengers became aware that something out of the ordinary was going on in the car.

All faces were turned upon Gopher and the old man, and the manager of the Great American Circus looked for a place to crawl out of the incident.

"I may be mistaken," he said, suddenly desisting. "People make mistakes nowadays; but the man who robbed me boarded the train at Fairview."

"That's a broad accusation, sir," answered the old man. "What if an innocent woman got on board there?"

"But none did—I saw no one board the train in Fairview but yourself. Good-morning."

Gopher turned and walked back to his own coach.

He had been plundered with a good deal of cunning, for his inside pocketbook was missing with valuable papers the very thought of which unnerved him.

"I'll telegraph George at once when I reach the city," said he as he brooded over his misfortune. "A fool falls asleep when he should keep awake, and I was the fool last night."

During the rest of the trip, Gopher thought of the robbery, and more than once of the man he had tried to make disgorge.

When the train pulled into the Grand Central Depot in New York he was on the alert, and his first move was toward the telegraph office.

He sent in cipher the following telegram to George Farrell:

"Robbed on the train last night. Lost the papers and my pocketbook. Watch Mantelli, and if he meets Fontenoy report at once. Be careful. They are on the trail.  
GOPHER.

Having sent this message, Goldstar left the depot and took a cab for a certain part of the city.

Half an hour later he sat in a well-furnished room not far from Madison Square, with his chair drawn up to a table covered with soft green baize.

Goldstar was still anxious-looking, and the events of the past night had left their trace on his hardened face.

He was at home once more, far away from the Great American, which he had left in the hands of Gentleman George, and he could afford to smoke a little while he thought.

All at once the bell of the front door rang, and Gopher leaped to his feet.

"What, word from George already?" he cried, as he darted into the hall and leaned over the banisters, listening to the woman and the messenger boy below.

A telegram had been delivered, and for him.

Gopher seized the envelope and tore it open.

The message was brief and very startling, and all color faded from his face.

"My God!" he cried, staggering back. "Why didn't I kill him while I had a chance?"

#### CHAPTER VIII.

##### THE SILVER WITNESS.

The telegram received by Goldstar in New York was not in reply to the one he had sent Gentleman George, though it was from that shady same individual.

Gopher's brows contracted while he read it, and, flinging it aside, he uttered the exclamation we have just heard:

"Why didn't I kill him when I had a chance?"

In another moment he was looking at the reflection of his own face in the mirror, and what a face it was!

"Abandoned the show? I thought he would. It's a deep and dark conspiracy. They are in league against us. It is a plot, but wait—wait till I get the cards in my hand. He may be heading for New York, and he'll be met on his arrival."

He flung himself into a chair at the table and wrote a reply to George's telegram.

He knew that the messenger boy was waiting in the hall below, chatting with the landlady, and in no hurry to depart.

Gopher Goldstar tore up the first two telegrams he wrote and flung them across the room into the smoldering ashes in the grate. The third one stuck.

Folding it, he sealed it up and went out.

He handed it to the boy, paid for the telegram, and saw the messenger go out.

"They may be laying for the boy," he suddenly thought. "I'd better go with him."

He rushed up stairs and seized his hat, and in a moment was on the street.

The dawdling messenger was in sight, and in a little while Gopher had him in tow.

He did not lose sight of the boy till he entered the telegraph office, and even then he lingered in sight of the operator till he saw his telegram to Gentleman George on the wires.

"There's nothing like it," said Gopher to himself, well pleased, as he turned back. "They didn't intercept that message, and they won't know what I sent to George. It won't stop the show, but it may. Ran off, did he? I never liked the looks of Mantelli, and when I saw him signal the man who calls himself Jack Fontenoy I knew that something was up."

The end of the next hour found Gopher Goldstar in a cramped apartment in a dingy quarter of the city waiting for some one to enter.

The room was not in keeping with his own appearance, but he had come thither for a purpose, and, for a man playing a desperate game like the senior partner of the Great American Circus, he was at home everywhere.

Goldstar watched the door like a hawk,

and at the first squeak he started expectantly.

The person who entered was a man of sixty, with cunning-looking eyes and long, dangerous hands.

At first glance one would have taken him for a foreigner, but his voice told that he was not, and his greeting was in merry tones.

"You're making it, I hear," he said to Goldstar. "I see by the newspapers that the Great American is a hit. Good actors, good crowds, and lots of money in the coffers. You can thank me for some of the latter, Gopher."

"Consider yourself thanked, Gloster. Yes, we had good business, but I'm back in New York."

"So I see. Something wrong, Gopher?"

"Yes—all wrong."

The man with the long hands had drawn close to the showman and was looking down into his anxious face.

"I was robbed on the way down."

"Robbed? Come, you don't expect me to believe that any one is sharp enough to plunder you."

"It is true. I was asleep."

"I thought a weasel never slept."

"There," said Goldstar, putting out his hand. "No joking at my expense. It's a serious matter. I was robbed, I say. Some villain on the train took advantage of my loss of sleep and plundered me."

"What did that person get?"

"Everything I had in here," and the showman touched his left side, where the pocketbook had been. "It was a clean sweep. I carried the memoranda with me. I had it safe, as I thought, in there, but the silken fingers got it."

"Where did he quit the train at?"

"I don't know. He may have come on to the city."

"You searched the train, didn't you?"

"Yes; I accused an old man of the theft. He boarded the train at Fairview; I saw him, but he outwitted me."

"Why should an old man rob you?"

"That's what puzzled me. After the encounter Gentleman George and I had last night after the performance I was puzzled to think why I should be robbed by a man with white hair."

"Unless the hair was a wig."

"I've thought of that since landing here," said Gopher. "It could be so."

"What sort of an encounter did you and Buck have after the circus?"

Gopher leaned back in his chair and detailed the meeting with Jack Fontenoy, the man called Gloster listening to every word and speaking not till all had been said.

"That's all. Now get out of it what you can," said Gopher, as he wound up his narrative.

Gloster looked at him another moment, and then went over to the wall, where he touched a button ingeniously set therein and took something from the little opening thus revealed.

"Is that like him?" he said, throwing upon the table a portrait, which the showman snatched up eagerly.

"That's the man! I know the cut of his face. Who is he? Is Jack Fontenoy his right name?"

"No. He may have half a dozen, for all I know. You let that man hoodwink you completely."

"You don't mean to say that Jack Fontenoy robbed me on the train?"

"I don't care where you were robbed. He did it."

"The devil! Then he was the old man, after all. Why, he was eager to be searched. He opened his coat and wanted me to rifle his pockets."

"He knew what he was about. You wouldn't have found the papers if you had searched him. Jack Fontenoy, so called, is no ordinary person."

"I discovered that last night. He is either bullet-proof, or he hypnotized me when I fired at him."

"He did neither, for he is not imbued with any supernatural powers. He is mere human, but he's dangerous."



"I know it now. Why, Gloster, he has papers which I would not have parted with for the Great American."

The tall man with the skeleton fingers laughed.

"You may have to give the Great American up, anyhow," said he. "You two have your hands full now, Gopher."

"With Jack Fontenoy? Where does he hide when in New York, for I know that he doesn't live where we met him last night?"

"What would you do if you were to find him here?"

"Get back my property."

"What if you found the papers guarded at every point by more than one pair of eyes?"

"I'd recover them anyhow!" cried Goldstar. "Is he in the city now?"

"He is here."

In an instant Gopher Goldstar was on his feet and his right hand had closed on Gloster's arm.

"Give me his number. Zounds! Point out the nest of this king eagle and I'll show him a trick or two."

Gloster did not answer, and for half a minute he looked down into Goldstar's face, white and red by turns.

"Let's see; you haven't been away very long, Gopher?" he said, coolly.

"No. I've kept track of the news, though."

"Not of all of it."

"I mean I've watched the newspapers," corrected the showman. "Have you any other news?"

Once more the slippered feet of the tall man crossed the floor, and Gopher saw him halt near a window.

He put up his hand to a shelf against the wall, picked something off it, and turned back.

"Here's something else," said he, throwing upon the table his find, which spun a little there, and stopped in front of Goldstar's hand.

The showman leaned forward and looked at the object, then picked it up.

It was a silver dollar dated "1849," and looked but little worn since its mintage.

It fell from Goldstar's hand the moment he picked it up, and his face paled again as he encountered Gloster's gaze.

"Well, what of this?" he asked.

"Do you know it?"

"Why should I? There are thousands like it."

"Perhaps. You don't care for dates."

"No. Dates are nothing to me."

Gloster seemed to laugh, but he made no sound; he was looking at the hand and the dollar it had again picked up.

"It's the year of your birth," said he, looking steadily at the showman.

"It is, but I had not thought of it. Other people have come into existence during the same year."

"Hundreds of them, but all haven't handled a dollar like that."

"In the name of common sense, what are you coming to?" cried Gopher, and his face grew steadily dark as he spoke. "Where did you run across this piece of money?"

"I didn't run across it. It threw itself in my path."

"How so?"

"I stumbled on a bit of carpet, and in falling I accidentally turned up the dollar, which rolled across the room."

"That was strange. You must have been where there were dollars to roll," laughed Gopher Goldstar.

"I saw but one roll, and that was this piece. Perhaps I shouldn't have brought it off with me, but I couldn't help it."

"Well, where did you find it?"

"In the house of the crime."

"The house of what crime?"

"The murder of Harold Hart and the smothering of old Nathan in the steel safe. I unearthed that piece of money there."

"It's a queer find," and Gopher turned the coin over and over in his hand. "It might prove a clue to the person wanted by the beagles of Gotham."

"I thought of that."

"Why didn't you turn it over to them?"

"Because I wanted you to see it first."

Goldstar glanced toward the door as if he had heard a footstep outside, but in an instant his gaze had come back to the man with the long hands.

"I shan't deprive you of it. Why not turn it over to the police yet, Gloster? I don't like to see the detectives hunt in the dark. A pocket piece of '1849' found in the house of the crime might start them on a new trail. It may have belonged to the man who was murdered in the safe, or to Harold Hart."

"Or to the man who killed him," said Gloster. "I'm no detective, Gopher, but if I were, I would call this a clew."

The tall man picked up the coin and twirled it in his dark fingers, and Gopher watched it as it revolved on the oilcloth.

"What do you think?" he asked, looking up at Gloster.

"I think this piece of money belonged to some one who visited Harold Hart that night."

"To the murderer?" asked Gopher.

"I would say yes, but that is for Spangles when he comes here again."

"Spangles!" cried Goldstar. "I heard Joe call Mantelli Spangles the other night. Great God! I'm catching on pretty fast just now. What do you know about Spangles, Gloster Turk?"

#### CHAPTER IX.

THE GREAT SNAP GOLDSTAR MISSED.

The lengthy hands of Gloster seemed to clinch at this question, and he looked away to check his feelings.

The eyes of Goldstar were upon him, and the partner of the Great American seemed to hang on every word Gloster uttered.

"What do I know about Spangles?" said he, returning to Goldstar's anxious face. "I have a friend by that name, but he hasn't been here for some time."

"But you said the dollar would be a clew for Spangles?"

"Did I? Well, so it would."

"Is he a detective?"

"He knows something about the theory of crime. In other words, Spangles is a speculative detective, not an actual one."

"Ferrets out crimes in his mind, eh?"

"Exactly."

"Where is he?"

The man with the long hands shook his head.

"I haven't heard from him for some days, and I cannot tell you where he is."

"Did you ever hear of Signor Mantelli?" asked Goldstar.

"That's a professional name, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"I don't know the signor."

"But I do," said Goldstar, through teeth well clinched.

"I am much obliged to you, Gloster. I'll see you some other time. I won't quit the city for several days. The show is in good hands, and I came down here to transact a little private business."

Goldstar rose and swept his hand half carelessly across the table, dexterously picking up the silver coin, after which he made his exit, bidding Gloster a hasty good-morning.

"Back on a little private business, is he?" ejaculated the man left behind.

"It may be of a very private nature. Let him go. He didn't get very much out of me, but he is very anxious to hear about Spangles. There was the coin. It puzzled and startled him, and—where is the piece?"

Gloster looked over the table and then on the floor.

"He carried it away with him!" he exclaimed. "The villain took it off for a purpose. I'll fix him. He can't get through my hands in that manner and not hear from me later on."

Gloster Turk went to the door and looked out, but his late visitor was not in sight.

Gopher Goldstar was already half a

square away, and no one seemed to take particular notice of the man just from the heart of Pennsylvania.

"I beat the old fiend at last!" he chuckled, his hand closing on something in his pocket. "He didn't see me pick up the coin, and it's safe now. Catch me napping if you can, Gloster. You may have your secrets, but I have the key that unlocks them."

A few minutes later Goldstar sat in a half-darkened room in a clean part of the city, apparently waiting for some one to come in.

Like a hawk he watched the door, and at each breath he grew more anxious.

When at last the portal so well watched opened, he gave a little start, for Floss Hart stood before him.

The tall, cold-faced girl came forward and held out her hand as she looked down into Gopher's face.

"I'm glad to see you," said she. "How goes it with the show?"

"Admirably, Miss Floss," smiled the manager. "I left it for a few hours to see my friends here and to attend to a little pressing business. How are you?"

The set features of the girl did not relax, and her voice was hard, almost harsh.

"Things are not very lively here," she said. "The house seems lonely. He never was much life, you know, but since—the—the tragedy we are stared at by everybody, and I can't look out without being looked out of countenance. It's a shame."

"You'll get used to it," said Gopher, from the depths of his chair.

"I don't know when. Then, we are still pestered with detectives—new ones who think they can go straight to the secret. I don't let them in any more. Nevis has her instructions to that effect, and we have been enjoying a little rest for two days."

"That's a good idea!" exclaimed Gopher. "If you had put it into operation a little earlier it would have been to your peace of mind."

The shadow of a smile seemed for an instant to rest at the corner of Floss's mouth.

"You see, we had to deal with the regular police and detectives, and we couldn't well give them harsh words. They don't come here any more, and we are free to carry out our own laws as we make them."

All this time Gopher was regarding the girl with strange, eager looks.

She had not seated herself, but stood as erect as an Indian, her tall, well-shaped figure standing out against the one lighted window in the room like a statue.

"Did you ever see a tall man here—a very tall one, who had a long hand?" suddenly asked Goldstar.

Floss shook her head.

"When was he here?" she asked.

"That I cannot say."

"I don't recall him at all, though he may have been here in the early stages of the excitement. There were so many who came that I couldn't keep track of them all."

"Maybe Gloster lied," thought Gopher.

"Was he a ferret?" suddenly asked Floss.

"In part, yes."

"Tall, you say?"

"Yes, and his hands were the most remarkable ones you ever saw. They were unusually thin and grasping-like, and his face—it was dark and thin, too. In short, he was a man whom you would never forget if you had seen him."

"If he came, it must have been while I was not in. I have been out several times since the double mystery, and he may have come during my absences."

"But Nevis would have seen him."

"That's her duty."

"Where is the girl?"

In answer to this question, Floss touched a bell on the centre table and sent its silvery tones throughout the house.



In response, Nevis, the maid, who had discovered Harold Hart dead in the library, made her appearance.

At the threshold of the parlor she stopped, and all color left her face, for her gaze had fallen upon Gopher Goldstar.

"Mr. Goldstar wishes to question you a moment, Nevis," said Floss. "He is a friend of mine, and—"

The maid uttered a slight cry, and Gopher looked at her as if he would ferret out her inmost thoughts.

Nevis came in and stopped close to her mistress, looking at Goldstar all the time.

"Nevis," said Gopher, "do you remember a tall man, dark of face and with unusually long hands, who came here during the excitement of ten days ago?"

The girl started a little.

She looked first at Floss, and then her gaze came back to the man in the armchair.

"I recall a man like that," said the maid. "I remember him distinctly, but he didn't stay long."

"When was he here?"

"It was several days after the two mysteries. He came in toward evening, and you, Miss Floss, happened to be out. He wanted to see the library, and I took him thither. I couldn't help it, for his eyes seemed to fascinate me."

"What did he do in the library?" asked Goldstar.

"I hardly know. I remember that he was very awkward, for one time, when crossing the room, he stumbled over the carpet and nearly fell. I remember nothing more about that man's visit."

"You can go, Nevis," said Floss. "You never mentioned this man's visit to me."

"So many called those days that I did not think of it," replied the maid, and with this she went away.

"Now, what about this person?" asked the millionaire's ward, turning to Goldstar. "Why does he assume such importance in your eyes, and what makes his visit here so startling?"

"I was only trying to put this and that together," said the manager. "He must have been one of those detectives who think they and no one else can find a clew. You see, that you've had visitors of whose call you knew nothing till now."

"But it won't be so again. If this man comes back, we'll know it, for Nevis won't be so remiss again."

Floss glanced toward the door, and, finding it slightly ajar, went over to it and closed it, afterward coming back to Goldstar.

"Come with me," she said, and the sport followed her from the room across the hall and into the fatal library.

The scene of the two mysteries was better lighted than the parlor, and Goldstar noticed the safe and the furniture.

"I have conducted you thither for a purpose," said Floss, in her cold manner. "Please take the chair at the desk yonder. It was his chair, you know."

Wonderment was uppermost in Gopher's eyes as he complied and turned his gaze upon the face above his.

"There are writing materials before you," continued the tall girl. "Now, please write as I dictate."

Goldstar dipped the pen into the cut-glass inkstand and held it above a sheet of paper which he had drawn half way across the blotter, while Floss dictated as follows:

"Know all men, that I, Gideon Goldstar, do solemnly promise to take as my lawfully wedded wife within ten days after the signing of this document Miss Floss Hart, ward of the late Harold Hart of New York, but murdered in the library of his late home by persons as yet unknown to the officers of the law, and that I promise to exact from my wife not one penny of the amount which she inherits under the will of the late Harold Hart."

The face of Goldstar changed color several times as his pen put these words upon the sheet before him.

At first his eyes beamed with satisfaction, and then they seemed to disappear within his head, while his face lost color and remained so for some time.

He did not sign the document, but, still clutching the pen, looked up into the tall girl's face.

"Sign!" laconically said Floss Hart.

"Do you mean this?"

"Why not?" cried Floss, her eyes getting a degree of warm light for the first time. "Am I not alone in the world now, and haven't I a right to seek my husband?"

"Indeed you have, but—"

"You refuse, do you?" and the girl bent forward and seized the paper. "You won't accept me under these circumstances. You robbed Harold Hart, you and your partner did, for the purpose of putting your scheme on the road; but you shall not plunder your wife. The document can yet be signed. I give you three minutes, Gideon Goldstar."

It was a strange wooing, none ever like it, and Gopher Goldstar, while he had secretly plotted to win the girl and thus get hold of the millionaire's wealth, shrank from the last clause of the paper.

What would Farrell do under the same circumstances?

He thought of this. Farrell would not refuse to put his name underneath the agreement. It could be broken. He and George would be babes in villainy if they couldn't break the last clause. Why should he hold back another minute?

He reached up for the paper, saying:

"I'll sign it and carry out the provisions of the agreement to the very letter," said he.

"You are too late!" cried Floss. "I shall present the document to another. You hesitated too long, Gideon Goldstar. You had best go back to the Great American. You may be wanted there. I am sure you have lost a wife, and perhaps a fortune."

Goldstar, with a roar of disappointment, started to his feet, but the white hand of the girl pushed him back.

"Too late!" she exclaimed. "You should have accepted at once. I will never present this paper to you again."

Gopher Goldstar did not speak, but deep down in his heart he cursed himself bitterly.

## CHAPTER X.

### A LEAF FROM SOMEBODY'S PAST.

Gopher, or Gideon, Goldstar walked, half-dazed, from the house on the now famous street.

The last words of the girl with the cold demeanor buzzed in his ears, and he could not help thinking about her.

That she should make such a cool proposition was a mystery to him, and the more he thought of it the deeper it grew.

"I missed it; but, after all, there may have been a string to her proposition," said he to himself. "It was so sudden and startling that I didn't get my head for a minute, and then it was everlastingly too late."

Gopher turned down the first street and walked rapidly.

He went back to the house he had sought immediately after his return from the show and sat down.

"Shall I fail just because I lost my head this morning?" he exclaimed. "I must have some of this fortune, and I can't get it without first getting a hold on Floss. She won't repeat the offer, eh? By Jove! a man doesn't have a wife offered him often in this manner. What a consummate ass I am!"

A continuance of these reflections was interrupted by a knock, and Goldstar bade his visitor enter.

The door opened, and the long face of Gloster Turk appeared. The showman started.

The man with the long hands stopped the moment he saw Goldstar, and for half a second the two men eyed one another.

"You picked it up, didn't you?" said

Gloster, without removing his gaze from the man in the chair.

"What do you mean?"

"The dollar of '49."

"I left it on your table. It may have fallen to the floor and rolled away."

The strange man came closer still, and his face seemed to get a shade darker.

"It didn't fall to the floor, consequently it didn't roll away," he said, dropping his voice to a threatening whisper. "You have it. I want that coin!"

Goldstar appeared to gather himself for a struggle with the man who had come in, but he did not betray his rage.

"Did you search the room?" he asked.

"It is not there, I say. You carried it off."

One of the long hands was thrust out, but not in the attitude of a beggar's.

"I am here for that piece of money, or—"

Gloster Turk paused.

"Go on," said Gopher. "You needn't stop on my account."

"I will take the dollar of '49, or you will be under arrest within an hour."

"Under arrest? What for?"

"Don't ask any questions. You know."

The hand was nearly in the showman's face, and the slender fingers looked doubly dangerous in the soft light that sifted through the curtain into the room.

"I make the last demand for my money," said the old man. "Hand it over, or go to jail."

This was the straw that broke the camel's back, for Gopher Goldstar sprang up and caught the tall man by the collar.

At the same time he uttered an oath of defiance and threw Gloster back, narrowly missing the edge of the table and landing him against the wall.

Gopher was strong and active; he had muscles of iron, yet muscles that bent easily to his will, and Gloster Turk discovered that, despite his long arms, he was no match for the showman.

"You want the money, do you?" hissed Gopher, as he held his victim against the wall. "This is the object of your call. Well, if I have it, I am liable to keep it."

"It will burn a hole into your pocket."

"Do you think so, Gloster? My hands are liable to play havoc with your plans for the future."

The only response to this threat was a mad look from Gloster Turk's eyes, and he shrugged his shoulders, but did not make an effort to get out of Goldstar's hands.

"We'll come back to the coin of '49 presently," continued Goldstar. "Walk over there and sit down."

He pushed Gloster Turk toward the armchair at the table and turned upon him with a cocked revolver in his dark hand.

The man with the long hands saw the weapon and walked over to the chair.

He sat down quietly and seemed to await Goldstar's pleasure, as if the weapon had had a wonderfully quieting effect on his nerves.

"I want to know more about this Mantelli," said he.

"Mantelli?" repeated Gloster Turk.

"Yes; you call him Spangles sometimes. He's the star rider of the Great American just now, but he's a person with more than one name, and a man with a purpose."

There was no immediate reply on Gloster's part; he only looked up into the sport's face and kept silent.

"You are looking for him. You said you would turn the dollar over to him—that it might give him a clew, since you say you stumbled across it in Harold Hart's room. Now, tell me who Mantelli is, and why does he want to find out who killed the millionaire?"

Gloster Turk was not to be browbeaten, if the man who stood over him was desperate and armed to the teeth.

"I don't know Mantelli, I say," he said, doggedly.

"He is Spangles, I say! Don't think of him as Mantelli. That was only one



of his many names. As Spangles, who is he?"

"If I tell you, what will you do?"

"That depends," answered Gopher Goldstar. "I may laugh at your explanation, or I may take action."

"By looking up Spangles, eh?" cried Gloster. "I'll take the coin first."

"I won't give it for your story. It may be a tissue of falsehoods."

"You have it, then?" laughed the man with the long hands. "You did carry off the dollar of '49?"

Gopher colored slightly.

"The coin or no story!" repeated the man in the chair. "You don't expect me to talk for nothing, Gideon Goldstar."

"No; but you'll not get the coin till the story of Spangle's life has been truthfully spun in this room."

Gloster suddenly sprang up and waved his hand defiantly.

"Then there will be no story spun!" cried he, stepping free of the chair.

In an instant the revolver was looking into his face with the stern and severe countenance of Gopher Goldstar behind it.

"Don't be too fresh," said Gopher. "This is my game, and all the cards are in my hands. I have but to press the easiest trigger in Gotham, and your den will soon be for rent."

"Press the trigger," coolly said the man confronted with the six-shooter.

"You utterly refuse to tell me about Spangles?"

"I utterly refuse!"

"I will give you half a minute. Look at the clock yonder and note the yellow hand, plainly seen from where you stand."

Gloster threw a swift glance at the clock on the shelf and then lowered his gaze to the face before him.

He did not look like a man who intended to be frightened into the betrayal of a secret; he was cool now and the old nerve had come back.

"How long have you known Spangles?"

"A number of years."

"Where did he come from?"

"You must ask Spangles that."

"One of the secrets he never shared with you, eh?"

"Perhaps."

"Why did he join the show?"

"Is he with you, really?" queried Gloster Turk.

"Come! You know he is. You know that Spangles is Mantelli, the bareback rider. You know, too, that he joined us for a purpose, and he keeps in communication with you, besides."

The semblance of a smile overspread the tall man's face.

"Spangles, if you must know, Gideon Goldstar, is a man of secrets, and I never interfere with them nor ask him about the future he has mapped out."

"You don't, eh? No, you don't interfere with any person's affairs, yet you went to Harold Hart's house like a licensed ferret and tried to pick up a clew."

"What if I did? Why, man, I used to know one of the men who died that night in that house."

"Harold Hart?"

"No, the other one."

"The man found mysteriously in the safe?"

"Yes."

"A friend of yours, Gloster? They called him Nathan Moneybox; the police, I believe, have found out a good deal about him, but you can supply one or two missing links, if you knew the dead man very well."

"I supply no missing links," snapped Gloster Turk. "If I have any to give away, they go to Spangles," and he laughed while he looked at Goldstar.

"Don't play with my temper," cried the Showman-Sport. "I am not here for pleasure. Since you are back to Spangles, Gloster, tell me what else you found in the house that night besides the dollar of '49?"

Gloster Turk stepped aside and threw a sudden look toward the door behind Gopher.

"I'm going now," said he, with the coolness of a desperado.

"When I give you the liberty," was the answer.

"I am going out. Remember, the man who stops me will have a terrible witness against him."

"How so?"

"Press the trigger now against your finger and find out."

"Take another step toward the door and fall dead on my carpet."

Gloster Turk only smiled, but he stood still, as if the last threat had awed him.

For the fraction of a second the two men stood face to face, when suddenly Gloster Turk threw out one of his long darkish hands, so much like a thug's.

"I see a house in another city," said he, looking beyond Goldstar with the strangest of eyes. "I see a little woman sewing at a window, and there are bars at the panes. I see her look up at the blue sky and sigh. Her needle falls from her hand and she drops back in the chair. I see her faint in the light of the evening and lie like one dead in the chair, her half-finished dress falling from her white and nerveless hands to the carpet. The woman, thin-faced and gaunt, is alone. Overhead hangs a bird-cage, but the canary in it is dead; its little body as emaciated as the woman's."

"Presently some one comes to the door on the outside and unlocks it. A face is thrust into the room. It is the face of a man past thirty, and handsome, as the faces of men go. He looks into the room where the woman lies in her faint and sees her in the chair. I see a smile that would do credit to Satan steal over his face, and for some time he remains at the door. By and by he slips into the room, shutting the door behind him. He steps up to the seamstress and searches her clothes, but not until he has felt the wrist for the pulse. This man takes from the woman's pocket a pocket-book of black leather and transfers it to his own. He robs the silent, and perhaps the dead. He gloats over the poor creature for some time, and then glides from the room, locking the door behind him. Do you want me to go further, Gideon?"

Gopher Goldstar, who had listened to Gloster's story without once interrupting him, did not speak.

"Chapter number two," said the man with the long hands, smiling grimly. "But we'll give it some other time. I'll go now. Stop me if you dare. This whole history is written down, and the avenger will find it if you are fool enough to press the trigger where you stand."

Gloster Turk walked coolly to the door, turned the key in the lock, and with a triumphant smile opened it.

"You may keep the dollar of '49. There are other witnesses," he said, and then Gopher Goldstar heard the man go away.

"That story dooms more than one person," fell from the showman's lips.

## CHAPTER XI.

### BACK ON THE CITY TRAIL.

When this eventful day had drawn to a close and the lights of Gotham were flashing out over the thousands on the streets a man quietly landed at one of the crowded ferries.

He came unheralded and walked through the ferry house with a springy step.

Beyond the ferry he took a carriage and settled back among the cushions like one who was entirely at his ease.

He was a man we have seen before. He was Spangles.

Perhaps George Farrell would telegraph his partner in the city that Mantelli had deserted the Great American, and he would have told the truth had he done so, for Mantelli had for the present at least thrown aside his tights and was back in New York.

Spangles had abandoned the show for a purpose; he had left Joe Vincent with

the institution, watched by the alert Farrell, who had already discovered that the Great American had lost one of its best attractions.

No one had witnessed the Spotter's arrival.

He had the whole path to himself, and while the carriage carried him up town from the ferry he seemed to fall into a sober mood.

The vehicle stopped at last more than a mile from the ferry, and Spangles got out.

He stood for half a minute on the sidewalk, as if watching the carriage while it vanished, and then he walked slowly for half a square, mounted several steps, and jerked a knocker.

In another moment he stood in the presence of the man known to the reader as Gloster Turk.

The man with the long hand started at sight of Spangles, and the pair shook hands cordially.

"You didn't remain long on the road," said Gloster.

"No, I am back in New York. He is here, too, isn't he?"

"Yes."

"You have seen him, Gloster?"

"I have; he called on me and then I returned the call."

"Getting pretty familiar, seems to me."

"I went to see him on business. He had me at the trigger of his pistol, but you see I'm here, Spangles," and the tall man broke into a laugh.

"What was it about?" the detective-showman asked.

"In the first place, I went to him to get a piece of money back. He robbed me of it."

"What, has Gopher turned common thief?"

"Not quite; but that bit of money interested him, and he could not refrain from carrying it off."

"But he resisted, did he?"

"Yes. I came away without it. He has it yet."

"Was it only one piece, Gloster?"

"A dollar of '49—the year of his birth, you know."

"I see. He took it because of its associations."

"Not quite altogether so," smiled Gloster Turk. "I found that dollar where the mystery came into being."

"Where was that?"

"In Harold Hart's library."

"I see," said Spangles. "And he resisted its return—wanted to keep the dollar because you found it there?"

"Exactly. Now, Spangles, tell me one thing. How's the boy coming on?"

"Joe?"

"Yes."

"He is the star of the arena. He carries the crowds by storm with his riding and vaulting. The boy has a future before him if he wants to stick to the ring."

"I knew it!" exclaimed Gloster Turk. "Now that you are back in New York you must look out."

"For whom?"

"For Gopher Goldstar, for one. He knows that you are a ferret."

"Ferreted it out, did he?"

"He knows it, at any rate. He may also know ere this that you are not with the show."

"If he don't it isn't George Farrell's fault," said Spangles. "He must be aware of my absence. Never mind. I'll be on my guard for all my enemies."

For a little while Gloster Turk appeared to listen to noises that did not exactly come in from the street, then he rose and went to the door leading to the hall.

"It's the young rat coming in a little earlier than usual for a snooze in the nest."

"Where does he sleep?" asked Spangles.

"At the end of the hall out there, under the street window. He's a boy—a street arab."

"Might I see him?" and Spangles



crossed the room and opened the door without noise.

In another moment he was stepping lightly down the hall, and Gloster saw him bend over a piece of boyish humanity in the corner. It was cuddled up like a sleeping dog, but the detective saw the face which the sleepy arms tried to hide.

"Why, it's Buttons!" he said, and then his hand touched the boy's shoulder.

In another instant the boy was fully aroused, and was looking into Spangles's face.

"Why, bless me, if it isn't Spangles, old boy!" exclaimed the boy of street and gutter, sitting bolt upright in the corner. "I say, Spangles, old chap, what's the latest tip?"

The Circus Detective led the boy triumphantly back to Gloster's room and stood him in the light.

"Do you know him, Spangles?" asked the man with the long hands.

"I ought to. Buttons and I have been friends for some time, and he never goes back on Spangles."

"Wouldn't for the world, Spangles, old boy. We stick closer than brothers, but this gentleman here—he don't care much for boys."

Gloster laughed slightly, but his eyes seemed to grow moist.

"I did once—I did once," he said, hurriedly, and then he seemed to turn to Spangles for an explanation of his bringing the boy to his room.

"I may need Buttons yet to-night, and I thought I'd just bring him to the room," said Spangles. "You can snooze in the corner yonder, Buttons, till you're wanted."

The boy smiled and sprang to an old settee in one corner, and threw himself upon it.

In another moment he seemed sound asleep, and Spangles turned to the man with the long hands.

"Where will I find Goldstar?" he asked. "You say you called on him to-day?"

"He may not be at home just now, but you'll be likely to find him in the old nest—the one which he fitted up with Harold Hart's money."

"What is the news from the Hart residence?"

"I have none."

"Then you haven't called on Miss Floss since I left the city?"

"Not exactly upon her," said Gloster. "I had occasion to enter the house, but I didn't see the young lady. I saw only the maid—Nevis, you call her."

"The detectives are still working at the mystery?"

"Of course. The newspapers may have told you that. But to them, so far as I know, the double mystery is as deep as ever."

Spangles glanced at Buttons, and for an instant thought he caught the boy's eyes wide open.

They gleamed in their very blackness, but as he looked they seemed to lose their light and the head turned toward the wall.

But Spangles knew that Buttons was "playing possum," though he did not mention the matter to Gloster.

"You promised to take a look for Nathan Moneybox's nest," said the detective, turning once more to Gloster. "What have you done in that direction?"

"I made an effort, but I failed."

"What balked you?"

"A very strange circumstance," was the reply. "I thought I was on the right trail, but all at once I was baffled. The man who rolled from the steel safe when you opened the door the day after the tragedy took pains to conceal his abiding place, as if he didn't want any one to hear of it."

"You speak of a singular circumstance beating you. What was it, Gloster?"

"I was stopped on the street when on the hunt, and was induced to enter a house to see a woman in the last stages of poverty, but it was a sham."

"There was no such woman in the house?"

"There was not. The moment the door had shut behind me I was pushed against the wall and blinded with a handkerchief."

"But you struggled, of course?"

"I did, but it was useless. I was in the hands of a person who had the strength of a giant, and, despite my efforts, I was thrown to the floor and bound hand and foot."

"A pretty proceeding," smiled Spangles.

"When I had been thus served, I was picked up and whirled about till my brain swam. It seemed as though my head was falling to pieces. I never had an experience like it."

"Well?"

"I can't tell what happened during the next half hour. When I came to myself again I was lying on one of the benches in Battery Park, still dazed and half crazed."

"Can't tell how you came there, I suppose?"

"I have no recollection of any journey, but, of course, I was taken from the house of the decoy to the park. I sat up till I came to myself in full, after which I tried to find that place."

"And failed?"

"Failed signally," said Gloster, with emphasis. "It was the most startling episode of my life. I hunted for the house and then went home baffled."

At this juncture Spangles's attention was drawn to the settee where Buttons lay, and he caught sight of the glittering black eyes again.

They seemed to possess a merry gleam, and a smile appeared to come for a moment to Buttons's lips.

"Have you tried to recover the trail since?" asked Spangles.

"Half a dozen times, but always with the same result."

"The house is still lost? And the nest of Nathan Moneybox you cannot find?"

"That's it exactly. You remember, the police didn't know where the old man lived, so he was buried by the city in the potter's field the day after Harold Hart."

"I recollect," said the spotter. "They believe generally, don't they, that Harold Hart, before his own murder, put old Nathan in the safe, and smothered him to death?"

"They believe that. There's no telling what passed between the two men—no one knows why Nathan went to the millionaire that fatal night, nor what hold he had on Harold Hart, if any. But we all know that Nathan Moneybox was the man in the steel safe, and that he was smothered there."

"We won't discuss that phase of the case, Gloster," said Spangles, as he rose. "I'll see you some other time, for I'm back in the city to stay. The Great American will soon be with us."

"How so?" cried the man with the long hands.

"It can't remain on the road since the renowned Mantelli left it," and the detective laughed.

"Joe will come back with it, then?"

"Of course."

"And George Farrell and the others?"

"Certainly. They'll all be here."

"Then you will have to keep both eyes open. You see the stakes the pards are playing for."

"I see," said Spangles. "I accept the issue. Well, good-night, Gloster. What are you going out with me, Buttons?"

The boy had left the settee and was waiting for the Circus Detective to go away.

On the sidewalk under the lamps Buttons caught Spangles by the hand.

"I didn't sleep a wink in that house," cried he. "Just couldn't, you see. I know where Gloster was baffled. I can show you the house, and it's a place to be investigated, too."

"You're a brick, Buttons," said the Circus Detective.

## CHAPTER XII.

## THE TRAP AND THE GAME IT CAUGHT.

Spangles looked down into the urchin's face and smiled.

"I knew all the time you were only shamming, Buttons," he said. "You know Gloster and some of his tricks, eh?"

"I haven't been sleeping in his hall for nothing," was the answer. "I know how to take the old fellow."

"But how came you to know where he had his adventure?"

"I saw him come out of the house."

"In the hands of those who beat him there?"

"Yes."

"And you followed them to the park, where Gloster came out of his trance?"

"Didn't I, Spangles?"

"Well, Buttons, where is this house?"

The boy looked cautiously around, and then touched the detective's hand.

"I'll show you, but you must be careful."

"I'll be careful, Buttons. Show me where this trap is."

"It was a trap for Gloster, and, if he hadn't been looking for the trail, he'd never have run into danger."

Guided by Buttons, the Circus Detective was shown to another quarter of the city, where the boy stopped and pointed out a plain-looking house.

"That'll do, Buttons," said Spangles.

"Heavens! be you going in?"

"Perhaps."

"Keep your eyes about you, Spangles."

The ferret nodded, and then Buttons vanished, leaving him on the sidewalk not far from the place which had been pointed out to him.

For some time the Circus Detective made a study of the house, and at last advanced upon it.

The story told by Gloster Turk was still in his mind, and he knew that he might be led into the same trap which had closed on that individual.

Spangles went up the steps and rang the bell.

In a minute the door was opened by a woman, and he was invited to enter.

Once inside, the door was shut behind him and he stood in a semi-darkened hallway with the same woman before him.

"What is it?" asked she.

"I come from Gopher," said the ferret. "He sent me here to see—you."

A curious look came into the woman's eyes, and she walked to a side door, which she opened.

"In there," she said. "I'll be down in a minute."

Then the detective heard footsteps go up the stairs in the hall, and he was alone.

"This must be the woman I overheard Goldstar and Farrell talking about in Fairview. They call her Mercy, but she looks like Vengeance. She knows Gopher, for she did not deny it when I told her that I come from him. Ah, here she comes."

The strange woman was on the stairs again, Spangles believed, and he watched the door breathlessly.

He was a little startled when it opened, for instead of the woman standing before him, he was confronted by a man.

"Good! He sends you, does he?" said this person, who was short of stature and wiry, with restless eyes that seemed to dance like mad stars in their sockets. "Mercy said you had come."

"Yes. I come from Gopher. Ah, you know him?"

"Know old Gopher?" grinned the other. "I've known him for years, and the mere statement that he sends you is enough. How fares he?"

"He is still in the swim and ever will be."

"Exactly," was the reply. "Gopher is a cool one, but he went into a risky venture when he took the Great American onto the road."

"But it is a success," said Spangles.

"Yes? They're making money?"



"A good deal."

"Where did you leave them?"

"I left after the last performance at Fairview City."

"Yes, I heard they were to show there. Tell me," and the little man leaned toward Spangles. "What about this Mantelli, their chief rider? How does he do?"

"He is the drawing card of the show."

"And Joe Vincent, the Mysterious, and Fairy, the star?"

"They're doing excellently. Without them I don't see how the Great American could get along."

"It's partly my genius," and the speaker rubbed his hands with glee. "You don't know, perhaps, but Gopher does."

"I am aware of the part you have played and how much the show owes to your genius."

"That's it! Shake!" and the little man put out his hand and grasped Spangles's. "I told Gopher it would be a success, but, you see, when the backer died he grew disheartened, and—"

"That was a bad thing for us," interrupted Spangles. "Harold Hart had the wealth, but we have the genius."

"That's it—the money-making genius!" and the little man clapped his hands. "I say, sir, we shall get along famously. I am the secret-keeper for the firm. It's all right. They trust old Logan and he never betrays."

The secret-keeper for George Farrell and Gopher Goldstar!

Surely the Circus Detective had struck a rich vein.

"That was a pretty neat trick you served the old fox," he ventured.

In an instant there was a start on the old man's part, and Spangles waited.

"Did you notice her hands when you came in?" he asked.

"Yes. They're just the hands for the work, aren't they?"

"None better in the universe," laughed the other. "Why, he was a babe in Mercy's hands. She stood him against the wall and would have given the police another mystery if I had not interfered. We couldn't afford to carry the joke too far, you see."

"No. It went far enough. When the old fellow came to he didn't know for a spell where he was."

"I don't blame him. It was Mercy's hands—those pretty little hands—that can make a dress or choke a man to death. She's worth her weight in gold. Did Gopher send for the papers?"

"No. He only wanted me to see them, which would be proof that they were still safe."

In another moment old Logan bounded from the room, leaving Spangles alone, and he waited for his return with a good deal of anxiety.

When the little man came back he carried in his hand a lot of papers which he half held behind him.

"Here they are," he said, approaching the detective. "You can tell Gopher that you saw them in Logan's hands, which means that they're safe."

"Of course."

Spangles had caught sight of a bit of red tape which encircled the documents, and it attracted him.

"He wanted me to look at them, Logan. You may know what is in there, but George and Gopher were disputing the other night over a sentence, and—"

The other man drew back a little and looked stubborn.

"In which paper was the sentence?" he asked.

"In the main one," said the detective at random.

"The main one, ha? That's just what Gopher calls it. You'll do, sir. Here, look them over," and he threw the papers on the table.

The Circus Detective took a chair at the table and untied the string.

He felt that the cat-like eyes of old Logan were fastened upon him, but he did not quail. He was playing a desperate game—one of the coolest of his life—and

it stood him in need to play it well. The least suspicion, the smallest amount of distrust, and he would never walk from that house alive.

Spangles opened the papers without a tremor and looked at the first one.

It was a folded sheet of legal cap, covered with close writing, which he did not stop to decipher.

At that moment he looked up and discovered that he was the sole tenant of the chamber.

The queer little man had taken his departure so quietly as not to disturb him, and he had the room to himself.

Spangles turned to the documents once more and opened them one by one.

All at once a little envelope fell out of the packet and lay at his hand.

It was sealed, but the ferret noticed at one end a bit of thread that protruded from it.

The packet itself was a little weighty, and the ferret balanced it on his hand while he looked at it.

Could he have looked behind him at that moment he would have seen two faces that would have done credit to the fiends of the lower world.

A curtain had been pulled aside, and there side by side stood Mercy and old Logan, their faces close together, and their evil eyes distended with demonism.

But Spangles laid the little packet aside and turned again to the other papers.

"He refuses to pull the cord?" whispered Mercy.

"Wait! He'll go back to it," was the reply in the same tones. "He must pull the cord. Ah, that will be the best trick we ever played, old woman."

The only reply was a gleam of dark hatred in the woman's eyes, and the faces did not move.

Spangles, the detective, read one of the documents for some ten minutes, after which he glanced over the others and laid the whole aside.

"Look! he comes back to the little packet. He wants to see what is inside," said Logan to his companion.

"I believe it. Fate is playing the game for us at last!"

"He is fooling with the string. Shall we look on, woman?"

"Why not?"

Spangles had taken up the packet with the intention of giving it a closer examination than he had done before.

The little cord that hung out of one corner of it seemed to tell him that it was the key to what lay inside, and he held the packet between him and the light.

"He will lay it down, and we will lose," said the woman.

"He must not. Why, he might escape us then."

"He will not escape. We have him in our hands. No one will know but Gopher and us, and—"

"Wait! There he goes. He is going to pull the cord. It is all right, woman."

At this moment Spangles seemed to tug a little at the cord, and then the bell rang.

"Let it ring," said Logan, holding his companion back. "The noise will be like a puff of gunpowder, and it won't be heard beyond the room. Let the person ring and go away."

But the detective had looked up and nearly dropped the packet.

He stood erect with the chair behind him, and his eyes fastened on the door.

"Let me try my hands again. He will not open the packet," pleaded the woman.

"No, no. Give him time. There! the person on the steps is moving off, and he will become calm again. It's the spy we're after, Mercy."

Spangles had gone back to the fatal packet, and the cord was once more in his hands.

In another instant there was a slight noise, accompanied by a puff of smoke over the table, and Spangles staggered back.

A strange vapor seemed to fill the room.

"Come! don't breathe it," cried old Logan, jerking his companion from the opening. "We will come upon the scene by and by. It is death for us to inhale the gases."

"It is all over with the spy!" cried the creature who had admitted Spangles. "It's another proof that the mysterious slayer is invincible. Yes, yes, I'll come."

The faces left the spot and the curtain dropped back to its normal position.

Ten minutes later the same curtain was drawn aside once more and the same faces appeared there.

Old Logan bounded into the room and looked around. He was followed by his companion.

"He is gone!" cried the old man.

A scream of rage came from the woman's throat.

"It is true! I told you you had better let my hands at him, but no. You trusted in the silent death."

"I never knew it to fail. Look, Mercy. Look, woman. Not only is the man gone, but the papers as well."

"We are ruined!"

Old Logan stood like one paralyzed in the middle of the room. His hand trembled on the table, the edge of which he clutched.

He seemed to have been rendered mad by the discovery of the detective's absence, but the woman called him back to the true situation.

"The spy has the papers—the secret belongs to him! There is but one way out of it for us—but one thing to do."

"What is that?"

"Beyond the door yonder must lie some hiding place. We must not be found here. We have betrayed our trust. They will demand an explanation. They—"

"That's enough!" broke in Logan.

"Come! We vanish from this moment. But some day we will find this invincible spy; then death! death!"

And the white-faced pair bounded from the room and all was still.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### WOLVES ON THE TRAIL.

It was the next day when, Gopher Goldstar, entering his room, was confronted by his landlady, who told him that a gentleman had called to see him.

At the same time she handed the showman-sport a card upon which was scrawled a name at sight of which Gopher started.

"Back?" he exclaimed. "Back at this time? What has become of the show?"

"I can't say, sir," said the woman. "He will come back soon. You are to wait for him."

"I'll wait."

Goldstar had read on the card the name of George Farrell, and this was what startled him.

He waited an hour in the solitude of his room watching the door with the eagerness of a man driven nearly to distraction, and at last he heard George's footsteps.

He was at the door when Gentleman George opened it, and for a moment the two men stood face to face without speaking.

"What's happened?" cried Gopher, at last.

George came in and almost tumbled into a chair.

"The de'il's to pay," said he. "Where's your thin-faced landlady?"

"Down stairs. She can't hear us."

"You're sure of it, eh? She has a nose for news, and I don't want her about."

"Nonsense," cried Gopher. "Go on."

"Well, Mantelli's left us."

"Your dispatch said so."

"Joe Vincent has likewise vanished."

"What next?"

"The show has collapsed."

"Is that all?"

Gopher was provokingly cool.

"Great Caesar" exclaimed George, as



he twisted uneasily in his chair. "What more do you want?"

"No more news from Jack Fontenoy?" queried Gopher.

"No, and I don't want to hear from that country Ajax any more. I had enough of him the other night."

Gopher smiled as he recalled the encounter after the show in the Pennsylvania town.

"I can feel his accursed fingers at my throat whenever I want to," continued Gentleman George. "I'm the advance agent of disaster. You got my telegram? Yes. Well, what's happened here?"

"Nothing."

"You telegraphed me that you were robbed on the train."

"I was."

"Is it still a mystery?"

"Not much of one. I was robbed by the so-called old man who boarded the train at Fairview City."

"A spy, was he?"

"More than that."

"You must have gone to sleep."

"Perhaps I did, but come, don't reproach me, George. I can't stand the loss of sleep, you know, and I suspect I fell an easy prey to this cool plunderer."

"Well?"

"I haven't found him yet."

"What did he get?"

"The notes and the other papers I carried."

"Great heavens!" and Gentleman George was on his feet with a flushed face and eyes that seemed to look his partner through and through.

"Not that bad? See here. You must have played into the man's hands."

Gopher laid his hand on his partner's arm, and said fiercely, through clinched teeth:

"Stop where you are! No insinuations. I lost the papers, but I'll get them back. If you reproach me again, we'll dissolve."

The other winced.

"I was jesting, Gopher. Reproach you? never! I suppose I would have lost them as well. When did you see Logan last?"

"Not since I left the city with the show."

"We must see him at once."

"We will."

Five minutes later the two partners might have been seen on the street, and in a short time they reached the house in which we witnessed the startling adventure which befell Spangles, the detective.

No one opened the door in response to Gopher's ring, and in a few seconds that person took a key from his pocket and opened the front portal.

He and Gentleman George stood in the darkened hall and looked at one another.

"Why, the nest is empty," said George.

"It looks that way. But we shall soon see. There is a way of finding out for certain. This way, George."

Gopher led the way to the scene of Spangles's adventure, and stopped in the room.

He seemed to be staggered by the strange silence that prevailed, but he kept his composure in a marvelous manner.

"Gone, I think. But if anything happened Old Logan was to leave word over here."

He crossed the room as he spoke and turned a portrait half way round.

Thrusting his hand behind the picture, he felt along a little shelf set in the wall, but found nothing.

"It's a deception!" said George Farrell. "The old serpents have gone back on us."

"Logan dare not do that," said Gopher. "I hold both him and old Mercy in my hand, and can crush them at any time. We'll go over the house first—"

"And find the whole nest empty," broke in George. "There is another thing to be done. We must attend to people, and not to the Great American from now on."

Goldstar made no reply, but bounded into the hall and then up-stairs.

George could hardly keep track of him, and did not follow him very far, but re-entered the dark parlor and sat down.

Presently Gopher came back with disappointment written all over his countenance.

"Curse it all, everything's vanished," said he, hoarsely. "The documents even are gone."

"No? Then we must fight."

Gopher stood at the table like a statue looking down into the face of his companion.

"I intimated once that the woman might prove treacherous," said he.

"It was not the woman. She was all right. If there was a faint heart between the two, it belonged to the man—to Old Logan."

"What did you find up-stairs?"

"Evidences of flight."

"I have discovered something rather strange here."

"What's that?"

Gentleman George ran his hand over the table lightly, and then held it toward his partner.

"Do you detect anything?" he asked.

"Yes, a peculiar odor," said Gopher.

"Well, you can analyze it?"

"It smells like the fatal powder after it has been burned."

"It is nothing else," answered Farrell wisely. "The agent was exploded here on this table."

"But the mystery is, why was it exploded, and who was the victim? If Old Logan and Mercy did the deed, who did they operate against? Spangles?"

"I don't know."

"Jack Fontenoy?"

Gentleman George shook his head.

"We must find out. It always kills," said Gopher.

"Unless the victim's face is not directly over the powder."

"There's hope for him, then."

The men were silent for a little while, and then Goldstar said quickly:

"Old Logan and Mercy know. It is their secret, and they may be lying low till they can reach us."

"It may be so. If they killed they know who he was."

"Yes."

"I can see the old couple watching their work from a secret place. I can see the face of Mercy, seamed with eagerness and rage, for she is the faithful one of the pair, which is not saying anything against Logan."

Again Farrell ran his hand over the oil-cloth on the table and smiled.

"It was done right here. The spy, whoever he was, got his deserts in this room and the couple hold the secret."

"I hope so. But how came Joe to quit the show?" asked Gopher.

"He just pulled up and left. We had left no one of any account, but Fairy Flake and the inferiors, and I gave orders to have all dates canceled and Nolan has the property in charge. I took the first train for the city. Joe must be here, too. He gave me the slip in the night in time to catch the Express."

"In time to join Mantelli here, you mean," said Gopher, bitterly, and his hands shut. "Confusion on their heads! Wait. I'll show them that Gopher Goldstar is invincible. I have a great card in my hand. I will play it."

"Yes, the girl," cried Gentleman George. "Floss holds the strings to the old man's purse, and with her for your wife—"

Goldstar broke the sentence with a look.

He had not forgotten his last interview with the millionaire's ward, her startling proposition and his refusal to sign the marriage agreement.

He seemed to turn purple as he looked at his friend, and Farrell did not proceed.

"It's not to be that way just yet," spoke Gopher at last. "At least, I won't play that card now."

"But in the future?"

"Yes, yes. The girl and the fortune can't escape us, George. Just now we want to turn our attention to other people. We want to find first Spangles, the detective—the false Mantelli, of the Great American, and next the whereabouts of Logan and Mercy."

"Let's divide the work."

"Good. Toss for Mantelli."

Goldstar took a coin from his pocket, and balanced it on his fingers.

"Heads for Mantelli," he said, sending the piece toward the ceiling.

The coin came down and settled at Gentleman George's feet. He looked at it and then into Gopher's face.

"I'm to hunt the detective," said he. "Agreed! He never had a keener wolf on his trail than George Farrell. And he'll never want another there."

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### SPANGLES MEETS HIS MATCH.

The mystery of Harold Hart's death still puzzled the authorities, and they, in secret, confessed their inability to grapple with it.

Coupled with the startling crime was the death of Nathan Moneybox in the steel safe, though the ferrets had agreed that the old millionaire was guilty of this crime.

However, they failed to trace the safe's victim to his past record, for no one seemed to know anything about old Nathan.

Gloster Turk came nearest to the mystery, but we have seen how he was decoyed into the strange house when on the trail, and how he came back to his senses on the bench in Battery Park.

Spangles, the Spotter, in returning to New York, where he could doff the mask of Mantelli and reappear in his true role, had placed himself in the shadow of danger, for the two partners were ready to baffle him.

But Spangles was not easily caught, and he recalled his last interview with Floss Hart, in which he had promised to ferret out the crime of the library and bring to light, if possible, the true reason for the death of Nathan Moneybox.

The night after the tossing of the coin, which, in the minds of Farrell and Goldstar was to determine the fate of the detective, a man might have been seen looking at a certain window on a quiet little street far from the busy hum of Broadway.

This person occupied a doorway almost opposite the window and for some time he had watched it with increasing curiosity.

He did not seem to be over eager to enter the house opposite, but the window, in which there was a light, seemed to afford him a good deal of interest.

At last the light he had watched for an hour went out suddenly, and the watcher moved.

He crossed the street and waited till the door of the house opened and a man came out.

In another instant he had thrown himself upon this man's track, and, with the cleverness of the expert trailer, he followed him to the first corner and then around it.

If the person thus tracked was aware of the espionage, he did not manifest it by any outward sign, but kept on turning toward the river and dodging into a frame house not far from the swishing waves.

The tracker smiled peculiarly to himself as he saw the victim vanish, and then he turned back.

"It's all right," said he to himself. "He is still on the turf, and all I have to do is to go back by and by and wait till he shows up again."

Twenty minutes later he went back and fell to watching the house to which he had tracked the man.

When the watched one came out he was set upon again with the same vigilance, and in a little while the two were going back.



Once more the victim was tracked home, and the light reappeared in the upper window.

Then it was that the tracker seemed imbued with new life.

He retraced his steps, found the house near the river, and boldly rang the bell.

The moment the door was opened he pushed across the threshold and stood face to face with a man.

"What's wanting?" asked the person who had let him inside.

The watcher pushed on, the other following him in the light, and both entered a room alongside the hall.

"Great heavens, you?" cried the one who had admitted the spy.

"Why not?"

"I wasn't looking for you."

"Perhaps not."

"Where have you been?"

Spangles—the watcher was the Circus Detective—smiled and pulled a bit of crumpled paper from his pocket.

He did not say a word, but put the paper in the other man's hands, and then settled back while he watched him read.

"I see. You've been playing the old role. You've gone back to the profession!" was the exclamation the reader made as he looked up.

Spangles nodded.

"They give you a good send-off. What did it cost you?"

"Mantelli is criticised on his merits," said Spangles. "You see what a star I've become. Mantelli! That's pretty good, isn't it?"

"Excellent! But how did you know I lived here?"

The query was an abrupt one, and the detective had to smile thereat.

"I've known of this nest for some time. You had a visitor to-night."

"I?"

"Come. Yes, a visitor. He didn't care to be seen. He did not stay long, but slipped back to his own nest."

"Did you see him?"

"Yes."

"He's a queer man, is Old Logan. I've known him for years, and he trusts me."

"You would not betray him, I suppose," said the detective.

"To whom should I betray the old man?" cried the other. "If you are Mantelli, certainly not to you."

"But if I am a detective—a ferret—a man-hunter on the trail—"

The other interrupted with a sharp cry.

"I see!" he exclaimed. "You are now playing your true role. You are a human bloodhound."

"That's a pretty harsh name," smiled the spotter. "You wouldn't have applied it ten years ago."

"No, nor five. But, about my visitor. Old Logan is in trouble. He has lost his sister."

"Mercy?"

"Yes, the Amazonian sister, whose hands are hands of steel."

"Is she dead?"

"No; but it troubles him all the more because she is living; but where he does not know."

"He didn't think you had given her asylum, I hope?"

"I would as soon think of hiding the boss demon of Tartarus," was the answer. "She is not here. Mercy is gone. She has vanished. She will never come back to Old Logan."

"A good riddance, I would think," laughed the young ferret. "She may have gone off with some of his secrets."

"That's it. She has all of them, but I would trust this strange creature. I would trust her in some things. I mean, but if my life was in her hands and she hated me—not then, thank you."

"Of course not. But what did Old Logan say to-night? What about the mystery of the rich man's library?"

"Nothing. He did not mention it."

"Nor the other crime?"

"The man in the safe?"

"Yes. Didn't that enter into his errand?"

There was no reply to this question, and Spangles watched the changes on the face before him.

"What is all this to you, Spangles?" queried the other.

"A good deal, perhaps," was the ferret's answer. "A good deal to you, too."

"I can't betray Logan."

"You mean you will not?"

"Put it that way if you care to. I shan't object."

The hand of the Showman Sport was put forth till it touched the other's arm.

At the same time both men looked into each other's face.

"Concealing information of a crime is bad," said the ferret slowly. "It is nearly as bad as the deed itself."

"Not to my mind."

"You don't have the conscience you are credited with having," remarked the spotter. "You have a pretty good reputation for honesty, but after all, you don't deserve it."

"I won't betray Logan," was the repetition, spoken with a good deal of emphasis. "While I like you, Spangles, you can't get me to add one sorrow to that man's life."

"Not when you knew it would help to avenge the dead?"

Suddenly the man who had admitted the detective stepped forward and whirled upon him.

"What was this nabob?" he almost thundered, his figure seeming to increase in stature.

Spangles simply looked at him, but did not speak.

"He was a murderer himself. He shed blood. He made money hand over fist, and he would not for the world have the city know his past. Men called him eccentric. It was not eccentricity. It was guilt, the overmastering thought of his evil deeds which he could not shake off. Death overtook him in his mansion. It came in the night and he was found on the floor by the cold-hearted girl whom he took to his bosom like one takes a frozen serpent to be bitten when the reptile is warmed. This is Harold Hart. This is the man whose death you want to avenge. You come to me like a bloodhound on the trail and ask me to betray Old Logan, the man of sorrows and misfortunes. He has been other people's tool; he has played dark games for others and few for himself. I don't call him an angel, nor is his giant sister a seraph. Remember, I stand not between you and this pair in order to frustrate justice. I stand there for other reasons. The nabob of the avenue killed before he died. The man who fell from the safe when you opened the door was the dead witness of Harold Hart's guilt. What is to be your reward, Cyrus Spangles?—the gold he won by questionable means, or the icy hand of this bloodless beauty?"

"Neither," said the detective, who had not interrupted the person before him.

"Do you think I would marry Floss, the cold-hearted, the living mystery of the house of the double crime?"

"She plays for you."

"It cannot be. I have given the girl no grounds for such a game."

"But she plays for you just the same."

You are now in the shadow of danger, not from the hand you hunt, but from the cold hand of the dead nabob's ward. You cannot have studied this creature. You must not have looked into her eyes and caught there the real flashes of selfish fire. She wants you to hunt the murderer of the nabob, does she? You have become her man-hunter, and she has told you that Nevis, and not herself, first discovered the crime of the library? Wasn't this her story, Spangles?"

"You read the newspapers," said the detective.

"I did. I read all about it, so far as they told. I read twice the well-coined story of this girl."

"The 'well-coined' one, you say?"

"Yes. You may be a lion on the trail, but if you can't drag from the heart of Floss the true story of that night's work

you had better go back to the circus and abandon forever the track of crime. She loves you as creatures of her sort love, but the cobra is always dangerous."

Spangles seemed to retreat from the keen glowing eyes of the man who had spoken thus.

"You don't mean all this," he cried.

"I mean it and more. I make no accusations. I betray no man's secrets. I have warned you, Spangles. Better the ring than the trail. Better the sawdust than the love of this woman."

"But I do not love her. You mistake me; you are on the wrong trail yourself. I will show you in time that you have wrongly thought of Floss, of the house of the double crime."

"I have made no mistake," was the answer in haughty tones. "You will stand some day or some night so deep in the shadow that it will take all the cunning you have acquired in the school of cunning to extricate you."

The speaker walked away, followed by the eyes of Spangles the Spotter.

"I can't get it out of him," he thought, and five minutes later he stood on the steps outside.

In another instant a figure sprang to his side, and he smiled as he looked on.

It was the figure of Buttons, and the boy's hand seemed cold as it was gripped by his own.

"They've tossed a coin for your life," whispered the boy.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE FLIGHT OF A WITNESS.

As we know, this was true.

Spangles stood looking down at Buttons for a second, and then, with the lad's hand in his own, the pair walked away.

"Where are they, Buttons?" simply asked the spotter.

"They have separated."

"Did you see them?"

"Didn't I?" and the eyes of the boy seemed to snap.

"How did you manage it?"

"I was on the back roof, and had a good view of the whole doings. I expect if they had seen me they would have made short work of me, and they wouldn't have tossed up a dollar about Buttons."

"Perhaps not," Spangles said.

Then, in his own peculiar way, Buttons proceeded and narrated the interview between Gentleman George and Gopher Goldstar, winding up with the tossing of the coin, which was to decide which one should hunt the young ferret.

"So Farrell is the hunter, eh, Buttons?" said Spangles.

"He's the wolf on the trail," was the answer. "And he said, remember, that when he gets through with you, you won't want another wolf of that sort after you."

Spangles looked away, but at the same time he smiled as if he did not fear this foe.

The pair vanished in a tangle of streets near the Battery, the detective turned up at a door not far from the scene of the separation.

In an upper room of this house he greeted Joe Vincent, who recognized him with a cry of joy.

"Who told you I had come back to New York?" asked the young acrobat.

"Buttons."

"And who told Buttons?"

"Gentleman George, unwittingly," was the answer. "He heard that the Great American had utterly collapsed, and that the remaining manager had abandoned the institution."

"It is true. After you gave us the slip George grew restless and I knew something was in the wind. He got a telegram from Gopher, saying he (Gopher) had been robbed, and this seemed to quite upset him. After that the days of the show were numbered. I gave him the slip first, then Fairy Flake vanished, and



the whole thing broke down. So George is here, too?"

The detective nodded.

"I am not surprised. The meeting with Jack Fontenoy outside the tent was the starter, and then came the hasty trip of Gopher to the city. Who is this man Fontenoy?"

"I'll answer you later on," said Spangles. "I want to talk about another person, just now."

"Go on."

"Some time ago, long before the double mystery of the millionaire's house, Joe, you told me about running across a man on the street who stopped you and dragged you into the light of a lamp where he looked closely at your face."

"I remember the circumstance distinctly. It was more than a year ago, or just after I had obtained what I considered a clew to my parentage."

"Exactly. Well, you haven't seen this person since?"

"I have not. I have hunted high and low for him. He has never bothered me since that night, though on one or two occasions I thought I heard stealthy footsteps behind me."

"But you never saw any one on your trail?"

"I never did."

"Well, Joe, I believe I have found that man."

Joe Vincent started sharply, and his face flushed.

"Good, if you have!" he exclaimed. "It is just the thing I want to know now. That man knows something about my life secret. He said I had the muscle of an athlete, like my father, and then he laughed in a strange manner and vanished. Where is this person, Spangles?"

The Circus Detective did not vouchsafe a satisfactory reply, but Joe did not press the query.

"I see," said the youth. "I shall have to wait, and will try and be content. Don't lose track of him, Spangles. Promise me that you will not."

"I will not lose track of him, Joe," promised the detective. "I am in this case to stay, and you shall see the mystery solved if the enemy don't trip Spangles up."

"Don't let them do that, Cy. For heaven's sake, be on your guard, for the hand that struck Harold Hart down may be lurking in the shadows for you."

A fearless smile overspread the spotter's face, and he said good-night to Joe.

Half an hour later he might have been tracked through a certain portion of the city, but he was not seen.

The hour was not late, and he entered the home of the late millionaire.

"Miss Floss is not in," said the tall maid, who did not at first recognize the detective, but a moment later she seemed to do so.

"When will she return, Nevis?" asked Spangles.

"Not before to-morrow. She has gone across the river on a mission, the purport of which she did not impart to me, and the house is in my care."

There was some acidity in the maid's tone, which did not escape Spangles, and he said:

"Nevis, I am back on the trail. Would you show me the library?"

The maid started a little, and then led the way to the scene of the double crime.

In the library she lit the gas and turned upon the detective with the stump of the match in her long, slender fingers.

"Do you want to search the room again?" she asked.

"Not exactly, Nevis," and Spangles looked closely at the maid. "I want to ask you a question or two."

The girl seemed to lose a little color, but she soon recovered:

"I fear I can give you no clew," said she, with a faint smile. "I dare say you have heard all I have to tell, and the papers have printed my story several times."

"Certainly, but about the finding, Nevis. Let us go back to that. It was in the early morning, wasn't it?"

"Yes, sir, just after daybreak. You see as how I had had a sick headache nearly all night, and I came down-stairs before the usual rising hour to get something for it. Then's when I saw the library door ajar, and I looked in to see him yonder."

"Yes, that is the old story, Nevis. You stick to it well."

She gave Spangles a curious look, and then her gaze for a moment sought the floor.

"You don't mean to say that it's not the straight story?" she cried, flushing suddenly.

Spangles did not answer.

"They questioned me—the reporters and the coroner, and the detectives had a hitch at me, and they all acknowledge that it couldn't have been any other way."

Nevis was a little indignant, and her face was quite white while she spoke.

"Yes, but, Nevis, a story well stuck to is as good as the best. It sometimes pulls one through and gains him a good deal of notoriety. I've heard a good many well-coined stories in my time."

"Then you don't believe mine! Come right out and say so, Mr. Spangles. You needn't go behind the bush about it. I understand you; you came hither to entrap me."

The tall girl looked taller than ever and her hands seemed to sink into her palms.

"When did you come in that night, Nevis?" asked the ferret, coolly.

"It was after ten, sir. I was out that night—it was my night of the week."

"You went to the opera, did you?"

"Yes, sir—to the opera."

"Just like you told the coroner and the detectives."

"And you as well, Mr. Spangles."

The Circus Detective bowed, and the girl flushed scarlet.

"But, Nevis, one more question," said Spangles.

"I'll answer it, if I think proper," was the reply.

"Sut yourself about that," smiled Spangles. "When you came home that night who was with him in the library?"

"I have already said no one."

"Your published narrative. You did not look into the library?"

"I never did so, when I found a light there."

"No? Not a servant's business. But who left the door ajar, Nevis?"

The tall maid did not start now. She stood erect before the ferret, and her eyes seemed to ignite.

"The man who left him dead over there, I suppose," she answered.

"You suppose so, Nevis?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do I not speak to the person who left that door open?"

Nevis took one step back and her hand fell upon the table, where rested the cut-glass inkstand of the dead nabob, and it seemed to grip it madly.

The keen eyes of the detective intercepted the movement, but he did not appear to interpret it.

"There, don't accuse me of complicity in this murder!" flashed the girl. "When I called Miss Floss she came tottering down the steps and saw what I had seen."

"No doubt of that Nevis. But you had seen it before you cried out."

The hand at the inkstand got a firmer clutch, and the next moment it was poised above the maid's head.

She would have hurled it with crushing force into the detective's face if he had not sprung agilely forward and gripped her uplifted hand.

For a moment he looked Nevis fairly in the face, and the arm showed signs of weakness.

In another moment it had been permitted to set the inkstand down, and Nevis was speechless.

"Let me go," she suddenly cried, wrenching herself away, and then she broke from the detective's clutch.

Spangles looked at her as she crossed the library, and at the open door she turned and gave him a look of scowling hatred and vanished.

Spangles heard her on the stairs, and smiled to himself. Whether the game had been worth the candle was known only to him, for he did not follow her.

He stepped to the desk and pushed some papers aside, while he looked at others there. Almost at the same moment he heard a strange noise overhead, and in a second he was at the open door.

"Some one seems to have shut down a window up stairs. Was it Nevis?" said the ferret.

Spangles bounded up the steps, and halted in the corridor leading to the main sleeping rooms on the second floor.

At the window at the end of the corridor, a window which overlooked a porch at the rear of the house, he caught sight of something that attracted him.

It vanished as he looked, but the sight took the detective forward as fast as his limbs could carry him.

It did not take him half a second to reach the spot and throw up the lower sash.

Something seemed to fall from the sloping roof of the porch the moment he looked, and he heard a noise like some one dropping to the ground.

"I see! The girl is in full flight," said Spangles, as a figure flitted through the garden. "Nevis is running away. The witness is determined not to be examined again by me."

He shut the window and stepped back.

As he did so he saw a man at the head of the stairs, and then a sharp report sounded in his ears.

The new-comer had fired point-blank at him, and Spangles felt the wind of a bullet as it sped past his head.

At the same time he thought of Buttons and his warning.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### A ROW IN THE FIRM.

Spangles saw that the man at the head of the stairs was a man of cool cunning.

He did not stop to ask how he had entered the house, nor when he had come upon the scene. It was enough to know that he was there and on a deadly mission.

The spotter had little time for thought or action; he knew that the foe would not spare him, and that the fingers at the trigger were as merciless as the glare of the eyes.

He leaped forward, straight down the corridor, only to see the revolver lift a little and then another jet of fire flashed in his face.

Spangles recoiled, staggered back, and struck the wall near the window with a dull sound.

Darkness came and he knew no more.

The career of the showman-detective had seemingly come to an abrupt conclusion, and the man of many trails, the mystery-hunter of street and ring, had found his master.

Some time afterward a man entered a house far from the scene of this encounter and coolly picked a cigar from an open box on a table there.

No one was there to meet him, and he sat down in the best chair in the room and smoked while he waited.

That he had achieved a victory of some kind agreeable to him in every way his countenance indicated, and he smoked on with a face seamed with satisfaction.

An hour passed thus, with the smoker undisturbed, and at the end of it footsteps came up to the door on the outside and he watched it eagerly.

It opened to admit Gopher Goldstar of the Great American Circus, but the moment he stepped over the threshold he stopped and looked at the tenant of the room with a good deal of curiosity, as if he did not expect to see him there.

"Well, what tidings from the seat of



war?" he asked, taking a cigar from the same box.

The other man, who was Gentleman George, took from his pocket a ring, which he tossed carelessly on the table.

Goldstar leaned forward and picked it up.

"Mantelli's!" said he, lifting his eyes to those of his companion in cunning.

Farrell nodded.

"You saw him?"

"I won the toss of the dollar, didn't I?"

"Of course."

"And it was my duty to find him."

"Good!" cried Goldstar. "Did he give you much trouble?"

"There," said Farrell, with a gesture. "Don't ask me too many questions."

"I will not. The ring tells enough. You would not rob the living, ha, ha!"

Gentleman George made no reply, but looked at the ring and then took it back.

"I haven't found Logan and Mercy yet," remarked Gopher. "The old reptiles have given me the slip completely. I will find them yet, never fear."

"They can't hide long from you in this city, if they are still here," replied Farrell. "There are several places where clues might be obtained."

"Yes, and all will be visited in time. The time for our startling play is about here. With the circus collapsed and the game of death on its last legs, we must look to the golden part of it."

"I was thinking in that line when you came to the door," said Farrell. "Now, if the newspapers to-morrow morning give the city another mystery, don't be alarmed."

"Will they do that?"

"They may, I say."

"I understand," cried Gopher. "You'll do, George. If you had handled Jack Fontenoy as easily as I think you have handled this detective known to us as Mantelli, to others as Spangles, why, we have thrown danger to the four winds." Gentleman George smoked on, but did not answer. He seemed wrapped in thought, while Gopher Goldstar waited for him to speak again.

"I only trust you made no mistake," said Gopher, suddenly. "One made now might prove fatal."

"I make none," the hand of George fell upon the table. "See that you do as well. See that you leave no trail behind for this man whom I found is not the sole spotter in Gotham."

"I know that. There are scores of others, but this one had a bitter purpose in this hunt."

"I know that. He is the girl's hunter."

"Do you think so?" queried Gopher.

"If Floss put him upon the trail she may want to know what has become of him."

Gentleman George laughed unmolested, when he suddenly threw his cigar away and rose.

"I'll see you to-morrow," said he.

"Mind you, watch the newspapers, but be startled at nothing."

"I'll watch them."

The men parted, but on the steps beyond the door George halted.

"I wonder if he really means to capture the girl," he said to himself. "I might have drawn him out a little. A query could have unlocked his secret. Why not know it before I go away?"

He went back to the door and walked into the room to see Gopher Goldstar in the act of taking something from a concealed hole in the wall.

At sound of his partner's footsteps Gopher turned and flushed.

"What is it?" he asked, glancing at the table, as if Gentleman George had forgotten the ring.

"You told me not long ago that you had the girl fairly in tow, and that at any time you could fasten the whole matter of the old clown's fortune."

Gopher started.

Perhaps he noted the eagerness with which this question was asked, but whether he did or not he was wary.

"I said something in that direction, I believe," said he.

"You really said that within ten days you could become the husband of the clown's daughter."

"Did I?"

"Certainly. You haven't forgotten that nor changed your mind?"

"I haven't changed my mind, George, but just now—"

He stopped, for, that moment he thought of his interview with Floss, in which she had offered him her hand if he signed a certain agreement from which his cunning nature had shrunk.

Farrell waited coolly for him to go on.

"If you doubt your ability to win, let me try," suggested the man near the door.

For the minutest part of a second a smile appeared at Gopher Goldstar's mouth, but almost before it could be seen it was gone.

"I'm in dead earnest," continued George. "Let me try. Why not? I'm equal to the emergency."

He had advanced a few steps and stood at the table, from which he looked into his partner's face.

"She might have a choice of her own," Gopher said, in sharp tones.

"What if she has? If you have failed to bring her to time, I may."

"But I have met with no repulse yet."

"No? What's this?"

At the same time the hand of Farrell disappeared in his bosom and the next moment it came out again with something white between thumb and finger.

Goldstar started the moment he saw the bit of folded paper and flushed deeply.

"It seems to me you didn't take advantage of the opportunity," pursued Gentleman George, a gleam of humor in the depths of his eyes. "It was a little severe, that's a fact; but—"

"Where did you get that?" interrupted Gopher. "Did she—"

"A strange wind blew it across my path," was the answer. "I ran across it on the trail—the trail, ha, ha."

Gopher Goldstar did not reply, but his gaze rested on the paper in his companion's hand.

"You acknowledge the corn, ha?" cried Farrell. "You refused to put your name to this interesting little document?"

"I did. She sprung it on me unannounced. She thrust it before me, and didn't give me time to collect my thoughts."

"Floss is a cool one, anyhow and at all times; but I didn't give her credit for a play like this."

Goldstar stammered, for the words would not come forth as he wanted them to, and Farrell laughed:

"It's my turn now. I'll sign the paper—in fact, any one the fair creature thrusts before me. But I don't think she'll ever impose such a burden on me."

"I'm not through with her yet. I shall win in time."

"Not with this paper in the girl's hands nor with her mind made up, as it shows."

"But I'll bring her around. I'll show her that I am the master of just as much cunning as she can exhibit. That was only a little piece of diversion."

"A joke, eh? She did not intend to carry out the agreement, then?"

"No."

"Then, in the name of Heaven, if it is a joke, why didn't you sign? The change of a name will do it all. I'll call on her and see to it. What's the difference, so long as we are together in this little scheme? What reck's it if she becomes my wife or yours?"

Gopher saw that Gentleman George was terribly in earnest; he noticed the man's eyes and analyzed his mien.

"You can't take this play from my hands," he said, quickly. "That wasn't in the original bargain."

"But if you fail, and you have failed by this act, I am to play the winning

hand if I can. We must not lose the fortune; and the wedding places it in our hands."

"I see that; but she has not slipped through my fingers. She sticks there, despite her move. I'll go back and put my name to the paper. I'll reconsider—"

"If she'll let you! What if this girl refuses to present a document like this again?"

"Then I'll shift my hand and play another card."

"Keep cool," said Farrell, with a cynical smile. "I'm going to take this matter in hand for the present. I intend to play a card I happen to hold and one which no power on earth can keep from winning. It means a wife and fortune, the latter large enough to enrich both of us. We could put a dozen shows on the road. We can become the show kings of this country—the millionaire sports of the world. It all lies in my hands. I hold the key that unlocks the treasure house of the old clown."

"How?" asked the startled Sport, who had listened to these words like a man in a maze.

"Never mind, just now," said Gentleman George. "The boss hand of the game is mine. I can play it out."

"And lose; that's it!" laughed Gopher. "You can't play it out and win. She won't give you a chance."

"I make my chances. You have seen me tried before this."

"Yes; when we met Jack Fontenoy," sneered Goldstar, and his companion flushed.

"You're sarcastic. Who missed a man at ten paces, and who was robbed on the train?"

The arrow went straight to the target, and Gopher Goldstar seemed to turn ghastly white.

He surveyed his partner from head to foot, like a gladiator about to spring, while the eyes of Farrell twinkled atrociously.

"Just keep cool," he repeated. "Give me a chance. If I fail you may try again. If I win, why, you shall have your share whole, without a penny deducted for commission."

This was the last straw, and, with an oath, Goldstar bounded forward, to be caught by Gentleman George and flung back against the table.

"We're partners in this game," said he, through set teeth. "You have had your inning; now comes mine. And if you interfere, by Heavens! I'll turn loose the dogs of fate. Remember that I am the old tiger of other days. Men call me on Broadway 'Gentleman George;' but you know that I have two natures; so don't rouse the one that kills."

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE MEMORANDUM OF DOOM.

Joe Vincent, the young acrobat, sat in the little restaurant which he patronized waiting for his supper, and at the same time looking over the last edition of his favorite paper.

It was the night after his return to New York after the sudden collapse of the Great American in the heart of Pennsylvania, and he had seen Spangles and heard the latest from the lips of his friend, the Circus Detective.

Joe did not take notice of those who came in and dropped into the chairs at the tables around him.

He was not aware that he was seen till he was touched on the arm, and looking in the right direction, he discovered a boy eyeing him eagerly.

"You're Joe, the tumbler, aren't you?" asked the boy, whose face had the unmistakable cast of the street urchin.

"I am," said the acrobat. "Who are you?"

"I'm Buttons," the boy lowered his voice and then proceeded: "I was told once that you hashed here."

"Who told you?"

"Spangles."

At this Joe became doubly interested,



and the boy seemed to take delight in his attention.

"Would you mind going with me?" Buttons asked.

"Go where?"

"On a singular trail. I've been looking for Spangles, but I can't find him, so the next best thing to do is to take you to the place."

"To what place?"

Before he answered Buttons threw a suspicious look around, and his gaze seemed to rest for a moment on a man who was discussing his supper three tables away.

"Don't ask me here," said Buttons, turning again to Joe. "Just come on. But you haven't hashed yet?"

"No. Is it so important that you can't wait? I'm a little hungry."

Buttons settled back with a look and told Joe to eat his supper, which came just then.

"It'll keep," said the boy, with another glance. "Things like it don't spoil like fish in a summer's market."

He scraped the newspaper toward him and began to read, while Vincent turned to his own meal.

In a few minutes Joe looked at Buttons, and the boy at the same moment caught his eye.

"I'll waltz out first. Meet me around the left-hand corner," he said, and the next moment he was gone.

Joe paid his score and left the room, wondering if he would really find Buttons at the appointed rendezvous, but he was not disappointed, for the boy was there.

"Now, come," said the boy. "It's a long run, but the game will pay for the tramp."

For twenty minutes Buttons led Joe from one street to another until the acrobat stopped him.

"We could have done this quicker with a cab," said Joe.

"With a brass-band cab, eh? Not for Buttons, if you please," was the retort. "Ketch Buttons coming down here with a cab cushion at his back! Not much, Joseph. But we're almost there."

Joe said no more, and watched the guide with a great deal of curiosity as he dodged into the mouth of an alley and seemed to vanish in the twinkling of an eye.

"This way. It's a strange find, the strangest you ever saw, and I'm sorry you're not Spangles."

At the rear of an old house the boy opened a gate in a thick fence and held it open for Joe to enter a dark back yard.

"Who lives here?" asked the acrobat, halting at the threshold.

"Nobody. Somebody did not long ago, as you'll see. But just now the old thing's empty, or nearly so."

Buttons escorted Joe across the back yard and opened a door leading into a one-story building, where the darkness of Egypt seemed to reign.

"Don't strike a match; there's a hole in the shutter," whispered Buttons. "We'll find the underground passage without a light."

Vincent followed his young guide in the dark, heard him open a door, and then went after him down ten steps.

The odors of an underground passage assailed his nostrils, but the acrobat did not draw back.

"In heaven's name, how came you to find this place?" he asked, pulling at the boy's sleeve.

"Wot's my eyes for?" was the reply. "Tell you, Joe, they is eyes, and you can't fool Buttons, if he was raised in the gutter. The other door is here and then—"

Joe heard the boy tugging at something in the dark, and at last a door seemed to open before them.

The circus star put out his hand and touched an oozy wall, which sent a thrill through his nerves.

He uttered an exclamation at this, and the boy laughed lightly:

"We're under the worst nest o' rats in New York," he said. "I tell you, Joe, it's the death walk here."

"But the thing you say you found here? Where is it?"

"In a second, no longer," was the assurance. "Walk straight ahead and don't touch the walls—they're wet."

Joe did so, but the uneven stones under his feet at times threw him out of his bee-line, despite his efforts to keep "straight ahead," as Buttons phrased it.

At last this strange journey came to an end, and Joe Vincent breathed his thanks for the termination.

"It's on the stones here," said the boy in the dark. "You can't see it without a match, though."

Joe had a lucifer in his hand almost before the last word was out of Buttons's mouth, and the little light seemed to waver under the foul vapors that filled the place.

"What is on the stones?" queried the circus star.

"The marks—the record of the great mystery."

"Where is it?"

Joe saw the figure of Buttons spring forward and noticed that it stopped just before his arm, while, with one hand pointed at a certain gray stone in the wall of the corridor, he turned to him with a triumphant look.

"That's it," cried Buttons. "That's what I wanted you to see. I'm only sorry you're not Spangles, for you're no detective."

Joe was at the spot in an instant, and his match almost touched the stones as he leaned forward, his heart stilled, as it seemed, by excitement.

"Don't you see the record?" asked Buttons. "How did I happen to discover it? I come down here now and then on the funniest mission you ever heard of. Beyond this passage lies a great sewer, and I hunt it for valuables."

Joe did not seem to hear the boy.

His match had revealed certain marks on the gray stone, and they had become intelligible.

What at first seemed a lot of jumbled hieroglyphics stood out like letters of blood on a white surface, and no wonder the acrobat's eyes seemed to bulge from his head.

"Ain't it a hummer, that information?" cried the street urchin. "Ever see anything like that, Mr. Joe?"

Joe Vincent shook his head and again he read the inscription on the stone:

"Harold Hart, April 10, 188—"

There it was—the record of the murder mystery in the millionaire's mansion.

Why should it come to light under the streets of New York? Why be found by the boy of the gutter far from the place where the crime had startled thousands?

It was a puzzle for Joe, the acrobat.

"Who put that there, Buttons?" asked the acrobat.

The boy shook his head.

"You know what it is?" he said.

"Yes, the name and date of Harold Hart's death by the assassin."

"What a snap for Spangles!" cried Buttons, as he looked at the inscription in the light of Joe's third match. "But I haven't been able to find him. He wasn't at home, you see."

"It's not cut into the stone, Joe," continued the boy. "It's put there with an indelible pencil as thick as your finger."

"I see that, Buttons. The person who put it there knew about the murder."

"Certainly. He wanted to make a note of a fact; he didn't care to forget."

"When did you find it first?"

"This afternoon."

"Perhaps you may have passed it before in the dark."

"It is possible; but it wasn't there day before yesterday, for I came down here with a light and could have seen it if it had been on stone."

Joe was about to try another match when Buttons darted away and struck at something on the ground.

"They ge' in here from the main sewer," explained Buttons coming back. "You can get out into it by going a little further down there, and then you can walk under the millions up yonder."

Joe bunched several matches which Buttons held while he (Joe) improvised a little torch out of a cedar pencil which he split and thrust between two stones, where it burned like a wax candle.

"This stone seems to be loose," said Joe, moving the stone with the inscription. "If it is we may be able to understand why the date was put there."

"Loose!" cried the boy. "It moves! it moves, Joe! Pull it out and look behind it. Jehu! what a snap for Spangles!"

Joe found that it was easier to suggest the removal of the stone than its actual removal, but, watched by Buttons, he tugged at it till it seemed on the point of yielding.

It had been loose for some time and had evidently been taken out before.

It was not more than a foot square, and reaching up with both hands the acrobat grasped it firmly and lifted himself on his toes in his supreme effort.

"It's coming," cried Buttons. "That's the way, Joe. Why, you're a reg'lar Samson."

Joe smiled as he pulled the stone from its place in the wall and lifted it down.

"The door! the door!" gasped the street rat. "Some one's at it, Joe."

At the same time the dirty hand of the boy extinguished the burning pencil and total darkness reigned.

"We're caught in a trap," he whispered, clutching Joe's sleeve. "We must hide in the sewer, for the door up yonder has opened."

Visibly excited, he pulled Joe away from the hole in the wall and before the acrobat could thrust his hand into it.

If there was a prize or a clew behind the stone bearing the memorandum of doom they had lost it at the last minute.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### JOE VINCENT MEETS HIS MATCH.

Darkness reigned once more in the tunnel and for some time the two friends stood there touching one another, but speaking not.

Buttons had pulled the acrobat forward until he felt a puff of foul air on his cheeks, and he knew he was at the opening of the main sewer.

"Listen!" said the voice of the boy at his side. "Don't you hear it coming down the passage?"

"I hear, Buttons," said Joe, and then, with faces turned toward the object they could not see, both listened intently and with their nerves at their greatest tension.

Something was coming down the tunnel, something that had a stealthy tread, and the young acrobat thought he detected the swish of garments in the dark.

But he said nothing of this to Buttons while he waited for the unknown to strike a light and thus let him solve the mystery of the underground way.

Presently the footsteps stopped and the two companions drew closer together.

"It can see in the dark—I know it!" said the snipe.

Joe made no reply, but the next moment a little cry escaped his lips, for a light had flashed up.

In another moment they saw a figure near the wall from which Joe had pulled the dated stone, and it grew into the stature of a woman there.

"I know her," whispered the boy, while Joe stared. "She's the murdered man's heir."

Joe hugged the wall at the mouth of the sewer, but did not speak.

Could it be that he was gazing upon Floss Hart, the heiress of a million, in



the heart of that grimy tunnel, with a match in her hand and in the dead of night?

What had brought her to that spot, and why had she stopped there with her icy face and uplifted hands reaching toward the hole in the wall?

"She wants what's behind the stone," continued the boy. "See! she feels in the place, Joe, and—"

The hand of the woman had vanished in the hole made by the removal of the dated stone, and now she stood in the passage with something in her hands.

"She's got it!" cried the boy, pressing Joe Vincent's hand. "Quick! she'll get away."

Floss did not seem to suspicion anything by reason of the removal of the stone, but rather seemed to rejoice that she had found the objects behind it.

The match went out, leaving her in darkness, and the two companions heard receding footsteps. The woman was going back.

"She'll get away," cried the boy, anxiously.

"Not for good, Buttons."

"But don't you intend to follow her?"

"Not just now. Show me where the sewer trail leads to."

"And let her get away?"

"Yes."

In the sewer and among its foul odors the two friends stood for a little while, and then Buttons, with an admonition to Joe to look out for vermin, started off.

"It's better than going back the way we came," he explained. "I happened to find out this trail accidentally. Jehu! what a snap our discovery would prove to Spangles."

In less than ten minutes the boy had found a way out of the sewer, and the pair stood once more under the blue sky that roofed the city, with but little of the underground grime on their garments.

"You'll find her out, won't you, Joe?" asked the boy.

"That's my intention."

"You'll tell Spangles as soon as he turns up and let him play his hand?"

"Spangles shall know."

Joe Vincent was deeply puzzled over the adventure underneath the city, as he hurried from the spot.

"It's another mystery," said he. "That Floss, the nabob's heiress, should know the way to the dated stone, mystifies me beyond anything I ever saw. She knew the way, and she knew what was hidden behind the stone."

He did not find any one at his quarters when he went back and then he started out to find Spangles.

A visit to the Circus Detective's room did not unearth him, and his landlady said she had not seen him for some time.

"Shall I play the card myself?" the young acrobat reflected. "If I wait till I find Spangles the game may have grown too complicated. She is at home by this time. Floss, who carried away the prize nearly in my hand, has returned home, and if I fail to take advantage of my discovery, she may destroy the documents."

He turned in the direction of the house of the double crime, and rang the bell with some little uneasiness.

The door was opened by Floss in person, and the acrobat was ushered into the parlor opposite the fatal library.

He tried to fathom the thoughts of the cold-faced girl by her expression, but it told him nothing, and he was compelled to give up.

It was Joe's first visit to the house.

Even before the crime the life of the murdered man, or so much of it as the public knew, had strangely interested him, and ever since he knew that Harold Hart had backed the Great American, now no more, his interest in the rich man had not waned.

Floss seemed to study the face before her, but suddenly she said:

"You want to see me, I believe. I am at your service, Mr.—"

"Vincent," answered Joe, watching to see if the name startled her in any way.

The impassive face gave out no signs of surprise or interest and Floss waited for him to proceed:

"I have called, miss, for the purpose of confirming a suspicion. I am Joe Vincent, a circus rider—"

"One of the profession?" exclaimed the girl, with a very little start.

"Yes; but just now out of a job," and Joe smiled.

"What can I do for you?"

"You might tell me something about Harold Hart, your late guardian."

"Something about him? Why about the dead?"

"He was once, so I am told, connected with a show."

"Harold Hart?" and the white cheeks seemed to flush.

"It was years ago, and not in this city."

"Who told you?"

"It has been common report."

The girl relapsed into dead silence. She seemed to increase half an inch in stature and her eyes transfixed the young acrobat like arrows.

"When was he connected with a show? I must ask you to be a little more explicit."

"I cannot give you the exact date."

"Did he ever tell you so?"

"No, but—"

"The baseless rumor comes in here, doesn't it?"

Floss almost laughed, but not a sound came from her lips.

"It is not a baseless rumor, if you will pardon me," cried Joe, the acrobat.

"There are those who can substantiate it. He was once connected with the profession, but left it suddenly in the South and came to New York, where fortune smiled on him."

"And fate found him at last!" said the girl, coldly.

"Yes, he died here in this house, and that death is to-day the city's mystery."

"Are you one of those who seek to solve it?"

"I am one of the would-be solvers," answered the youth. "I am interested in Harold Hart."

"Why?"

"Because I wish to know about his past."

"His death sealed that. You can never wrest the secret from him."

"It was a secret, then?"

"One he guarded zealously—one no human could wrest from him."

"Not even the man found in the steel safe?"

"Not even that poor wretch—that old blackmailer," said the girl without a start. "He should have remained away that night. He simply muttered, moth-like, about the candle a little too long."

Floss leaned against the table and glanced toward the door, as if she expected it to open and admit some one.

"You will not give me any clew to the past of Harold Hart?" said Joe.

"Why should I, even if I knew it?"

"You should not try to keep back that which might solve the mystery of a birth and make a human being happy."

"Is that person yourself?"

"Perhaps."

"I answer no questions regarding the past of Harold Hart. I am mistress here. I have set a detective on the trail and it belongs to him. Whatever he finds out he may share with you if he cares to."

Her words were words of ice, and they came out coldly and in measured tones.

Joe resolved to bring her to time.

"You were on a secret hunt to-night?" he said.

"Who told you?"

"Never mind. You have just returned from your nocturnal trail."

"You seem to know more than you pretend. You have come to play the role the tenant of the safe did not play to his satisfaction."

"I have come hither for the truth, and your sex shall not protect you in keeping it from me."

The young showman believed he was playing his best and strongest card against this creature of ice and mystery, but she did not give him any encouragement.

His last words had failed to startle her and she was looking once more at him as coolly as ever.

"I go out whenever I wish," said Floss, with a haughty toss of her head.

"After dark frequently?"

"After dark," she echoed. "I am my own mistress. There is no living person who has the right to circumscribe my bounds when I quit this house."

"But to-night you proceeded to a strange place."

"Did I? I am liable to select strange places for inspection or visit. I am a strange creature, Mr. Vincent."

She was almost unassailable, was this young girl, and the acrobat thought of giving up the game.

"Perhaps you played spy," continued Floss. "You may have followed me."

"I did not. I was there when you came."

This was a bolt that sank deep and startled the cold-faced listener.

"Indeed? I did not see you, sir."

"Your match went out too soon," said Joe. "You should have explored the old tunnel."

"The tunnel? You speak in riddles to me. When did you ever see me under ground?"

"To-night, miss. You came down the old passageway and found the stones out of its place."

"Well?"

"By the light of your match you managed to rob the hole in the wall and you carried off the prize victoriously. You did not see me."

"You were a spy for all!" cried Floss. "You have been watching me. I am not to be blackmailed—not by a circus rider, at least."

Joe Vincent felt the sarcastic emphasis of the last sentence, but it did not frustrate him.

"You knew the documents were there," he exclaimed. "You went to the tunnel for the purpose of removing them. You know that the memorandum of crime was on that stone in letters of black. You placed the papers there to be found again when needed. You have played a cool game, miss. You selected the night hour for your visit, and you came off with the papers. I want to see them."

The tall figure of Floss fell back from the table, and Joe Vincent watched her narrowly.

"You want them, do you? You have come to rob me, even as you say I robbed the hole in the wall of the old tunnel? I am not to be beaten by a hand like this!"

Joe seemed at his wits' end.

Never before had he confronted a creature like this girl.

"She must be the murderer," thought he. "Why has not Spangles thought of this, for he has come in contact with her and must have studied her closely?"

"I admit nothing," cried Floss Hart at this moment. "You have done all the accusing. You say I found some papers in the wall of a tunnel. If I found any I keep them. You have sought to blackmail the wrong person. The other wretch was found dead in a safe of steel and his last moments were moments of agony. Would you look at the trap that held him till the ferret came?"

Floss advanced toward the hall door, but Joe did not stir.

"It is just across the hall—in the fatal library," she went on. "No one has opened the safe since they let its bird out. Come, Mr. Vincent, let me show you the steel cage."

But Joe, the young acrobat, declined, and then the finger of Floss, the cold-faced, entered him like a six-shooter.

"To the street, then! Enter this house."



my castle, again unsummoned, and your fate may be more terrible than was that of the tenant of the steel safe. Good-night! Watch or follow Floss Hart when she is abroad and reap the whirlwind."

## CHAPTER XIX.

## STILL ON JACK FONTENOY'S TRAIL.

The absence of Spangles was a mystery to Joe Vincent.

Once more back at the ferret's door, after his exciting interview with Floss, he found that the man he wanted to see had not turned up, and he left the place somewhat puzzled.

Spangles might be on the trail somewhere, but he would like to see him; the strange adventure he had had with Buttons in the tunnel beneath the old deserted house was waiting to be told in full, and Joe was ready to laugh over his meeting with Floss at the latter's home.

Once more that night he went back to the house with the same result—no Spangles.

As he turned from the place he caught sight of a figure that had a familiar look, and the next moment he was following it.

There could be no mistake. He had found Gopher Goldstar, the head manager of the Great American, and not wishing to let the fellow see him, Joe kept in the shadows.

What was Goldstar doing in the vicinity of the detective's rooms? Had he turned against Mantelli, and was he plotting to draw Spangles into a web of danger if not of death?

For more than an hour Joe shadowed his former employer, and at last lost him on Broadway.

He was in doubt whether Gopher had seen him, and came to the conclusion that he had been a little too clever for the cunning sport.

But Gopher was smiling all the time over a little trick of his own by which he led Joe to Broadway for the purpose of giving him the slip, and when he had done so he quickened his gait and turned up in another street.

"I'm going to know now once for all," said Gopher, as he entered a dwelling without the ceremony of knocking, and startled Gloster Turk at a small table covered with little pinchers and wires.

"You!" exclaimed the tall man with the long hands. "I wasn't looking for you."

"Perhaps not. Wished me in the river, no doubt, but I'll be here to plague the world for some time to come. You still work at the old trade occasionally?"

Gopher took a chair near the other and began to watch the hands of Gloster as they manipulated the wires and pinchers, making the frames for cheap brooches and wristlets.

"One must live," was the reply, but the speaker did not lift his eyes. "You make money hand over fist. You always strike it rich, but I never had a backer like—"

Old Gloster stopped and seemed to smile to himself.

"I've no backer now," said Gopher.

"You had till some one killed him."

"Yes. It was a bad blow for me. It broke up the Great American and brought us back to the city beggars."

The long hands stopped and the deep eyes of their owner looked slowly into Gopher's face.

"Beggars!" said he, scarcely above his breath. "It'll be a cold day when you two are paupers."

"You don't take my word for it?"

"No. I don't, there! Beggars, did you say? When you are it will be when there are no more people to rob."

"You're almighty harsh with an old friend. I won't call it an insult, though, but other men would not be permitted to make that comment unmolested."

"Thanks. How goes it—I mean, when will you reap the main harvest?"

"What's that?"

"The money the old nabob left behind."

"He left it all to the girl—Floss?"

"Well, isn't that to your liking? Which one of you intend to make her your wife?"

Perhaps Gopher thought of his last interview with George Farrell, for he flushed and averted his eyes.

"She's in the market, Gopher. If you don't hurry you'll miss the prize."

"We won't miss the prize, then," was the answer. "But, Gloster, you must lay aside the wires for a spell."

"Why?"

"I want you to talk; that is, you must have nothing on your mind but the matter in hands."

The old man scraped tools and material into a drawer before him, and became all attention.

"I am here to ask one or two questions, and I want them answered without reserve," proceeded Gopher.

"That depends, you know. I am not to be dragged into anything shady."

"Not for the world. Of course you have changed your life and are now a toiler in the ranks of honesty."

"That's enough!" cried Gloster Turk, and his hand shot across the table and caught Gopher's sleeve. "You mustn't trench on the years that lie behind me. If you have business with me state it and don't remind me of what I would forget."

"You're touchy, I see."

"Decidedly so. It is silence as to the past, or not a word from me."

Once more Gopher Goldstar grinned, but the face before him had not a sign of humor on its leathery surface.

"I want to know what's become of Jack Fontenoy," said the Showman-Sport deliberately.

"Did you have to hunt me up to ask that question?"

"Yes; you know."

Gloster seemed to shrink from the answer that seemed to tremble on his thin lips, and he regarded his visitor with reptile glances.

"I say you know," persisted Gopher. "He came to New York after he met us—George and I—in Pennsylvania. He is here and you can tell me where he hides."

"Perhaps he don't hide."

"He does from me, at any rate."

"What is this man to you that you must find him?" asked the long-fingered man.

"That is my business," snapped Gopher. "That belongs to me, and I want no questions—nothing but answers."

For half a second the face of Gloster Turk underwent more than one change in color, and then he said:

"You are right, the man is in the city. Jack Fontenoy is in New York."

"I know it!" cried Goldstar. "He is here to pit his accursed cunning against ours."

"Yours and George's, eh?"

"Yes."

"Why don't you go out and fight him fair?"

"I'll fight him as I think best," said Gopher. "One has a right to meet a foe as he pleases, not as others think he should."

"Years ago you didn't regard Jack Fontenoy as being much of a Hercules."

"It is true. Years ago we stood on the same footing and that man feared me."

"But he does not now."

"No. He robs a man wherever he gets a chance."

"When did he turn robber?" queried Gloster.

"Not very long ago, as I happen to know. The rascal plundered me."

"You should have been wide awake."

"Did he tell you about it? Did he show you the spoil of his crime?"

"He showed me nothing," coolly answered the long-handed man. "He never tells me much."

"Wants to keep his own secrets, eh? That's good, when one can do that, but this man can't—he never could. They will out in spite of him."

Old Gloster listened, with a good deal of patience, and when Gopher finished he passed his hand over the oiled cloth and said:

"You will have to watch, that's all, Gopher. If this man robs you it is because you can't throttle him."

"By Jove! that's it exactly," cried Gopher Goldstar. "Now, let's come back to business. Where is Gloster?"

Silence was the only reply Gopher received, and it nettled him to the quick.

"You won't tell me? You want all my plans to come to naught and you're really aiding our foes."

"I'm not playing traitor at all. I will not betray him."

"Nor assist us?"

"I must remain neutral."

"The devil you must! Let Fontenoy step in here ten minutes after I step out, and you'll put him on my trail. I know you, Gloster Turk. It was your nature years ago. You haven't changed much since, and if I should go out yonder and lift the curtain—"

"Go out and lift it!" thundered the man with the long hands. "You know where I am to be found, but be careful what you say of me. Don't tell too much, nor twist the truth. I am not going to be here long. I feel that the shadows are nearing me, and I won't resist. I am not the man of other days. I am not at the beck of any living person. Gopher, or Gideon Goldstar, you can tell the story, if you will; but, remember, there hangs over more than one head a sword deadlier than the sword of Damocles."

"Ha, ha, you're getting eloquent," laughed Gopher, as he left his chair and straightened before the old man.

"I am getting truthful," was the reply. "Out yonder is the trail and the world. Out yonder lie the toils, and the snares of a devilish plot. You must remember that the ferrets of crime never sleep."

"But they perish, all the same," almost hissed the Showman-Sport, as his body bent toward the speaker and his eyes seemed to snap.

Gloster Turk did not speak, but his face got an ashen hue.

"Remember that the blackest crime in the decalogue is now in their hands for ravelment. Don't forget for a moment that these men can go back and pick up old clues which they follow till they become fresh. They can ferret out the darkest crimes, no matter how well the fingers of the guilty cover them. Nothing stops them. Spangles can pick up the most hidden trail."

"Spangles?"

Gopher Goldstar laughed derisively.

He thought of what George Farrell had told him of the toss of the dollar, of the start, of the hunt for the Circus Detective and the report.

He could look down into Gloster's face and believe that he knew the fate of the detective, Spangles to the old man, Mantelli to him.

"Spangles can't find the plainest trail," he cried, after his cachination.

Old Gloster merely shut his lips and returned to the little drawer in which he had placed the tools of his profession, and while he took them out he whistled to himself.

Gopher Goldstar drew back and watched the old man as his own face darkened.

Gloster seemed totally oblivious of his presence, and when he had spread his work before him once more he resumed his task where it had been broken off.

For five minutes the Showman-Sport looked on, illy concealing his rage and at times swallowing hard. He at last rose and stood looking down upon the silent man at the table.

What an opportunity he had! The thought flashed through his mind like a beam of light.

Gloster Turk, the keeper of the secret—the friend of Jack Fontenoy—was not looking. A spring, a bound and two hands—he needed nothing more!



Suddenly Gopher Goldstar threw one foot forward and quivered over his victim. But the next instant the face of Gloster Turk was uplifted, their eyes met, the gaze of the long-handed man resting on his rage-seamed countenance, and the Showman-Sport had failed.

Not a word was spoken by either man. Gopher dropped his half-lifted arm, his eyes sought the floor, and while the orbs of Gloster, the secret-keeper, followed him, he slunk from the room like a whipped bandit.

## CHAPTER XX.

## THE EVIDENCE OF A MATCH.

Gentleman George, resolved to carry out his intentions as to Floss, the heiress, was in the act of quitting his lodgings when a boy appeared at the door with a letter.

The Showman-Sport took it and went back into his room.

There he broke the seal and read as follows:

"Mr. George Farrell: I have arrived in the city with the property of the Great American, and am to be found at the old house. If you want to communicate with me, you will know where I am. All bills have been paid and treasury needs replenishing. I owe a board bill which presses and would like to hear from you."

He threw the letter on the table with an angry gesture and then laughed.

"Let him wait! He has waited before. I have other business just now."

He went out, leaving the letter on the table and missed the boy, who sauntered from the house.

Gentleman George was faultlessly attired and looked as sleek as any dandy on this particular occasion.

But he was not at his ease, as if the brief letter had thrown him off a little, and when he turned the nearest corner he looked up the street half cautiously.

"You're the man I want to see," said a voice, as some one jostled him, and Farrell started as he looked at the speaker.

His look was a question and the other one seemed to enjoy it.

"Let's drop in here at the Red Bouquet," continued the person who had stopped him, and at the same time he led the way into a saloon, where there were private stalls.

Selecting the middle one, the stranger led George to it and the pair sat down.

"My name is Holcomb. I am a detective," began the stranger. "I want to talk with you."

"Well, go on."

The Showman-Sport had got his second wind, and was now as cool as usual.

"You're interested in the matter yet, aren't you?"

"In what matter?"

"The mystery of the millionaire's house. You remember. He was found dead in the library—murdered."

"Do you mean Harold Hart?"

"Exactly. You catch on, I see. He backed the show, and you ought to take a great interest in the affair."

"Of course I do," and Gentleman George began to size up his companion, who looked like a person of forty-five, with gray eyes and a good, if not a handsome, face.

"What's the reward?"

"We have offered none."

"No, and being interested so?"

"We are interested to a certain extent. He did back us, and we lost a friend when he died; but, you see, the Great American is no longer on the road—"

"I have learned that. Your partner is in the city?"

"Yes."

"Who has offered the reward, then?" Farrell shook his head.

"No reward has been offered."

"That's bad. We can't do all the work for nothing."

"Why don't you go to Miss Floss, the heiress?"

"Don't want to, you see," and Holcomb leaned toward George in a confidential manner. "Between you and me, I'd sooner some one else would offer the reward."

"You don't—"

The Showman-Sport stopped and looked into Holcomb's face.

"I understand," smiled the detective. "I am keeping my own secrets, but I'm in a fair way to spring a sensation."

"Not against the girl?"

"I haven't said so, have I?"

"No, but your manners indicate—"

"That it is against her, eh? There have been stranger things than that in the history of crime. I thought I would find you or Mr. Goldstar, and I preferred meeting you."

"To tell me in so many words that you can spring a sensation that will involve the young lady?"

Holcomb was silent, but his eyes spoke.

"You dare not carry this joke too far," said George Farrell, coldly. "This is simply infamous."

"That's simply your opinion."

"It amounts to an accusation. It throws a shadow across the girl's path."

"What is she to you?" inquired the detective, as he leaned back in his chair and sent a swift glance toward the man on the opposite side of the table.

"More than you may imagine," cried George. "The girl is to be protected. She shall not be smirched by one of your ilk. She needs protection and shall receive it from me to the bitter end."

The other coolly laughed and let his chair down solidly on the floor again.

"Very well," said he. "You offer no reward. You tell me to go to the girl. I will. I will see that she relaxes a little, for she is a puzzle, an iceberg, a strange creature, and just the kind who are to be feared when there is a fortune in the market, but still beyond the reach of her white hands."

"This is infamous," and Gentleman George leaped to his feet, while Holcomb looked coolly on.

"Call it what you please," said the ferret. "I may have come into the game a little late, but, better late than never. I am here for a purpose. You say you will protect the girl. Who will protect you?"

"I can do that myself."

"Very well. You need protection. Sit down, Mr. Farrell."

"No. I am going. Play out your infamous hand if you dare! The biter will get bit in this case. It is a plot against the girl. I will see that it is rendered useless. You're a pretty man—"

Holcomb interrupted the Showman-Sport by rising quietly and looking him fairly in the face.

The man was coolness itself, and for half a minute he looked across the table at George with all the sang froid of one who knows his cards and his adversary's hand.

"By the way," said he, "when you go to Miss Floss to acquaint her with my piece of infamy, please take her to the top of the stair and tell her what occurred there the other night."

Gentleman George seemed to stagger under these words, and for a moment he looked at the other one with eyes that appeared ready to spring from his head.

"Don't forget to tell her this," continued Holcomb. "It might prove a very interesting story for Miss Floss. You can show her the mark of the bullet on the wall just under the window, and, if she is very inquisitive, take her to a certain spot and let her look upon a sight connected with the scene at the top of the stairs."

Holcomb waved his hand and stepped toward the door of the private stall.

George looked after him and would have followed, but a glance seemed to hold him back.

"I'll see you later," said the detective. "You don't care to tell Miss Floss this story? Well, others may. Good-bye."

Gentleman George was alone.

He heard the departing steps of the cool head who had thrown himself across his path, and in a few seconds he ventured out into the saloon proper.

The detective was not in sight.

George hurried to the sidewalk and caught a glimpse of a man who looked like Holcomb.

"I'll let him know that he cannot frighten me," he said, under his breath.

"Curse the blackmailer—"

Some one ran against him, and he lost sight of the ferret; but a minute afterward he was again on the trail.

He missed his man, however. He hunted half an hour for Holcomb, but was compelled to desist.

"He may have been a fraud," he said to himself. "After all, there may be no detective of that name. I will see."

It did not take the Showman-Sport long to hunt up a man with whom he was acquainted, and who knew a good deal about the secret force of the city.

George was eager, but he did not want to let his friend think so.

He led up to the matter in hand in a cautious manner, and at last asked if a detective named Holcomb was known to the authorities.

"I know of none. He may be a 'private,' though," was the reply.

George had not thought of that.

"What was he like?" queried the friend.

George gave a good description of the man who had caught him on the street and taken him to the private stall of the Red Bouquet.

Then he hung on the answer like a man listening to his death warrant.

"I know a man who is up to all sorts of disguises—a man who is the shrewdest detective to my notion on top of ground, but he is not known as the most celebrated."

"Who is he?"

"His name is Cyrus Spangles. He used to be a circus rider, but of late years he took to the trail and has developed wonderful talent in that direction."

It seemed that George would fall off the chair. The air around him appeared close, and he actually gasped as the friend answered him.

"But this man couldn't have been Cyrus Spangles," he managed to say.

"I'm not so sure about that."

"I know Spangles; that is, I have seen him," said George. "I would know him anywhere and under almost any disguise. No, the man who met me a while ago is not that person."

"He can't be Holcomb, for there is no detective of that name in the city."

"You suggested that he might be a 'private.'"

"I did, but, come to think of it, I know the whole lot pretty well, and he doesn't answer the description of a single one of them."

"That's all," replied George. "All I have to say is: this man, whoever he is, would better steer clear of me."

"He tried to bleed you, did he?"

"No; he tried to throw a stain upon the character of a friend. I stand by my friends. That is my motto, and has always been through life. Let this man beware!"

"But wait. Don't make a hasty threat nor a foolish play. Don't show your hand. This man may know what he is doing, and if he should turn out to be Spangles, why—"

"Spangles he can't be! I know that much," and with this George strode to the door and opened it. "I'm much obliged to you, Tom. What I know, I know, no reflection on you, of course. Will see you later."

The Showman-Sport hurried away and turned up in a different part of the city.

Eagerness and anxiety shone in his



eyes as he unlocked a door and locked it carefully after him.

Proceeding to the end of a dark hallway he opened another door and paused on the first of a flight of steps leading apparently into a tomb of some sort.

Then he struck a match overhead and let the flame burn slowly, illumining the cellar-like place which he had invaded.

"Spangles the deuce! Tom didn't guess what I meant by my assurance that the detective who cornered me isn't Spangles. I'll prove it now."

The match had burned to its full and was throwing its light around the place.

Suddenly Farrell leaned forward and threw it from him to see it circle downward like a descending rocket.

It alighted at last, but the face of the man had undergone a change, for from anxiety it seemed flushed with triumph, for he was already laughing.

"Spangles, eh? That proves it!" cried he. "Tom would acknowledge it if he were here, but Tom shall never see."

With this he stepped back and relocked the door, and on his face lingered the sign of triumph which the visit to the dungeon had placed there.

But at the same time Gentleman George was puzzled.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### WHAT BUTTONS DID.

"Not back yet? Seems to me something's happened. I wonder if Joe tried to find the woman who came down the tunnel and reached up and pulled something out of the niche there? Joe seemed to know her, but I certainly do. It was a queer thing for a girl of her standing to do—a very strange thing; but she knew what was behind the stone and she wanted it."

The speaker was Buttons.

He stood in the shadow of a large building and the light of the nearest lamp failed to touch him.

It was verging on to midnight and the boy had occupied his station for nearly an hour.

His eyes were on the alert and he seemed to see all who passed him.

A cool wind swept up the street, stirring the flame in the lamps and now and then touching the face of the boy with the keen eyes and the friend of Spangles.

Suddenly Buttons started just a little.

A man had stopped a few feet from him and was looking at a bit of paper which he had taken from his pocket, and was examining closely.

"It looks like him, that it does," said Buttons to himself. "He is in other feathers now, but he's hawk all the same."

As the man moved away, he was followed by the boy, who left his place for that purpose.

"Hawk or buzzard, it's all the same," muttered Buttons. "Maybe he knows something about Spangles."

Half way across the great city and on a street where the lamps did not seem to shine with their wonted brilliancy Buttons nearly ran against his quarry.

The man had stopped in front of a house, the front windows of which he seemed to be inspecting very closely, and as he had halted in the center of the sidewalk and just around a corner, this is why there came near being a collision.

But Buttons, as quick as a cat, slipped around him, and when a few feet past him he looked back he heard the closing of a door and the man had vanished.

"He got inside, did he?" he exclaimed. "Must have signalled the birds in the nest there. I'll see."

The boy glided back, but the shutters gave forth no sign that the house was tenanted, and he was compelled to slip around to the rear and approach it through the dirty back-yard.

With his sharp eyes glued to the shutters behind the house Buttons held his breath, as he made out a light inside and heard low voices.

The boy spy was using all his senses to get at the situation, when he felt something drop over his shoulders from above and he sprang back with a cry.

He had been caught!

The black noose that had dropped from overhead had already tightened round his arms, pinioning them to his sides, and he was a prisoner.

As he looked up to see who had thus caught him, he was lifted from the ground and dangled in midair.

The horror of the strange situation thrilled the boy so as to prevent his crying out, and he was drawn up by unseen hands.

When he reached the sill of the open window above a pair of hands clutched him like vises of steel and he was jerked into a room there.

Buttons tried to spring back, but the hands held him and he was hurried forward through a darkened apartment.

Not a word was spoken, and presently Buttons was ushered into another room, where for half a second he saw what it looked like.

It was a large room, poorly furnished, with a high ceiling and carpeted.

This he saw for a moment, as it were; then his eyes were covered with a dark bandage and he was thrown into a chair, where hands held him securely.

"You were playing a pretty game, my young rat," said a voice.

Buttons looked up and a grin for an instant appeared at his lips.

"Who are you serving now?"

"Buttons."

"That's good. You don't scruple to lie even in the shadow of death."

"I tell the truth."

"But who employed you to play spy to-night? Not yourself. You know better, boy."

Buttons thought that silence might be golden, so he did not answer.

"You want to get out of this trap, don't you?" asked the same voice, with refined cruelty.

"I'd go, I guess, if I was free," was the reply.

"No doubt of it, but, don't you know, Master Buttons, that you're in a pretty pickle?"

"Seems like it."

A low conversation seemed to follow between two men, and then a pair of hands were laid on the boy's shoulders.

"Wait. Question him first about the other matter," said a voice, and Buttons waited for the query.

"Where did you go with the circus rider?"

Buttons started a little and looked surprised.

"They've seen me with Joe," he thought, hurriedly. "They know that I guided him somewhere. In the name of heaven, into whose hands have I fallen?"

"Tell us, boy," said the same unseen speaker.

Buttons took a long breath, which gave him time to make up his mind and then he spoke.

"With what circus rider?" he asked.

"He's a cute one," laughed a voice, which did not seem to be the one he had first heard. "Catch a young weasel asleep, will you?"

"By heavens! he shall tell me or lose his neck," was the hissed rejoinder, and the vise-like hands seemed to sink into the boy's flesh. "I'll show this young chap that he's in bold, bad hands before he's done with me. . . . persists in holding his tongue."

A short silence followed, and for a time Buttons flattered himself that he was going to get off easy.

"Come! time's up," cried the torturer. "We'll come back to the circus sharp. Where did you go with him?"

Buttons ground his teeth and settled back in the chair.

The following moment he was jerked out of it and hurried across the room in the dark.

"Into the pit with him! Into the trap that never yields up its victim!" cried

the maddened voice of the man. "Thus be it with all who refuse to tell the truth!"

A key turned in a lock which the boy could not see, but he seemed to be held back as a last chance for him to retract and tell about his trip with Joe Vincent.

"Once more! Where did you go with the showman?" said a voice at his ear.

"We went up town."

The words seemed to be wrung from the boy on pain of death. He was pulled back, but the door was not closed.

"You took him somewhere, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"You sought him for the purpose of making known to him a discovery of some kind?"

"Perhaps."

"No equivocation!" thundered the voice of his persecutor. "We want it all."

"I had a little trail that did not pan out," said Buttons. "I made a blunder. I'm not detective enough for that, you know."

In the silence that followed this ruse of his it seemed to Buttons that the two men looked at each other, but he did not hear a word pass between them.

Would his ruse succeed or would it be detected and the worst follow?

A few seconds would tell the tale.

"It's another lie," said one of the men. "He is playing for time and liberty. Shove him down!"

Buttons held back.

All the strength he could summon to his help he threw into the struggle against fate.

"Don't let him escape," cried some one. "If he does we are undone."

"Let the rat of the gutter get away? Never!"

Buttons threw out one foot and it touched the wall, where he braced himself, while his teeth seemed to crack with resolution. It was now or never.

"Pull him loose! I can't quite manage him myself. He's a regular little Hercules."

Another hand touched Buttons, and just then he squirmed from beneath it and freed himself.

He fell sprawling on the floor and the blindfold dropped from his eyes.

He saw again the lighted room and the figures of two men. He saw them as they stood irresolute for an instant, and at the same time he noticed a door that seemed to lead into the room through which he had been conducted to the present chamber.

For Buttons to see this open door with the danger that menaced him was for him to make a break for freedom.

In a flash he was off, and into the darkened room beyond. He cleared the death chamber with a bound, but he had the men at his heels.

Fear lent speed to his limbs, fear seemed to give him wings, and he gained the sill of the open window.

It did not take Buttons any time to throw his body over the sill, and he did this just as a hand touched him.

He hung for a flash to the sharp sill, that seemed to sever his fingers, and as a face appeared in view above and a hand seemed to swoop down upon him he let go.

The fall seemed never to end, yet he must have gone downward like a falling bomb.

He struck the ground directly beneath the window and staggered to his feet.

Out of the lions' jaws!

Buttons glanced upward as he bolted for the back fence; he saw no faces at the window now, but he saw a flash and heard a sharp report.

"Missed!" he said, with triumph, as he bolted away. "You can't hold nor kill the weasel of the gutters."

But before Buttons gained the fence he felt a sharp pain in his side. He had been struck after all; the shot in the night had not entirely missed him, and he gritted his teeth as he threw his body over the fence.



"I must find Spangles, for I know them!" ran through the boy's mind. "I must see Joe, too, for they wanted to find out where we went and what we saw in the tunnel."

He ran for the street, the pain growing more poignant all the while, and his sight wavering.

There were mists before his eyes and the lamps vanished; his ears were filled with strange sounds like the rumbling of heavy wagons, and as the boy gained the street and stood for a moment in the glare of the lights he seemed to fade away.

With a cry he threw up his hands and fell forward.

"Spangles, Spangles, look out!" he tried to say. "They are on your track. They tried to pump me; but I would not let them."

Whether he said this or not the boy did not know, but he thought he did.

In a few seconds a crowd gathered around a boy lying in the gutter and a policeman picked him up.

"He ran out of the alley there and tumbled over," said one of the spectators. "He seemed to have a fit. I never saw a boy act just that way before."

Then some one saw blood, which had not come from the boy's nose; his left side was covered with it, and they opened his clothes to find more.

"He's dead! dead!" said a voice. "He's been shot."

Just then a man walked away and looked at another man near by.

"It was the best shot of your life, Gopher," he said, in low tones.

#### CHAPTER XXII.

##### THE FRINGE OF THE PRECIPICE.

"I told you I would play the surest hand."

"What sort of a hand have you played?"

A smile stole over George Farrell's face, and for a moment he looked at his friend Goldstar without answering.

It was the day after the events just recorded, and the two sports sat in Gopher's room, at his lodgings.

George had just come in to find his companion quietly smoking at the table, apparently at his ease and at peace with the world.

"You don't mean to tell me," said Gopher at last, "that you've really carried out your threat?"

"What threat, pray?"

"Why, the one to the effect that you would supplant me in the affections of Floss."

"I didn't know you shared the afore-said affections," grinned George, as he picked up a cigar. "I am her affianced lord, all the same."

The Havana nearly fell from Gopher's mouth, and for half a second he stared and glared at the man who had just spoken.

"You haven't done that, George," he managed to say at last.

"Read that."

A paper fluttered between the Showman-Sport's pocket and the table, and was eagerly seized by Gopher.

As he read he turned white.

"I don't think it's a fair deal," he suddenly cried.

"You don't, eh? You had the same chance and rejected it."

"No; I only hesitated."

"Well, the man who hesitates is lost, you know."

Gopher bit his lip, but made no reply.

"When does the ceremony take place?" he managed to ask, after a spell.

"Within six days."

Gopher Goldstar seemed to breathe a little easier.

"The fortunes will be shared by both of us," George continued, puffing away.

"That's the bargain. Did she make the proposition herself?"

"She made it to you, didn't she?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's the way it came around to me."

Gentleman George coolly picked up the marriage agreement and transferred it to his pocket.

He was very cool, but Gopher, who watched his partner like a hawk, saw the old smile of triumph, which he could not wholly conceal.

He looked like a man who had missed a prize. He glared at George and seemed ready to spring from the chair and grapple with him.

Farrell walked away at last, leaving Gopher in no enviable frame of mind.

He stopped not till he had placed some ten squares between them, and then he entered a little house, where he seemed to be at home.

"Thought I couldn't do it, didn't he?" he chuckled, his mind going back to Goldstar. "Let me play out this hand and I'll look out for number one when it comes to the fortune. But there's that infernal doubt again. Is he in the pit? Did I really see him when I threw the match down there?"

He was uneasy; he walked the floor for a time and drew up suddenly at the window.

"The boy's fixed," said he. "The little street spy is out of the way and won't bother us any more. As for Joe, the tumbler, we needn't fear him now. And Gloster Turk?—he's Gopher prey. Then, lastly, there's old Logan, who can't be found just yet. He's in the city somewhere and keeps the secret of the death powder, which was exploded in the old nest. The dogs at large are all at fault, and the game's in our hands."

For a little while longer the Showman-Sport sat in the arm-chair, to which he went from the window, and then he sprang up and darted into the hall.

"I thought I heard the bell," he exclaimed, and when he opened the door he stared with a cry into a woman's face.

"You?" said he, admitting her. "It's a pretty trick you've served us—you and your brother."

The woman was old Mercy—Logan's secret-sharer, and her face changed color as she moved toward Farrell's room.

"Sit down and tell me all," commanded George. "You know what happened last in the nest."

She merely looked at him and crossed her dangerous hands, and eye met eye for a full minute.

"Where is he?" asked George, eagerly.

"Logan?"

"Yes."

"You force the truth from me. He is dead!"

"Dead? Logan? In the name of heaven, woman, when did it happen?"

"Last night."

"Go on."

Mercy moved uneasily and looked away.

"Violence?" asked Farrell.

"Yes."

"Must I force every word from you?" cried George, quite out of patience. "You need not to have sought me unless you want to tell me all," he went on. "Who turned on him and struck him down?"

In reply Mercy held out her long hands, and the Showman-Sport seemed to shudder. At the same time a horrible suspicion appeared to take possession of him.

"I see. You did it. You must have disagreed," said Farrell. "You two were used to such things."

"I didn't want to hurt him, but he got angry and tried to hold me against the wall in his rage. I threw out my hands thus—I'll show you."

Old Mercy sprang up and threw out her hand, but with a cry Gentleman George recoiled.

"Don't!—don't touch me with those talons!" he exclaimed. "I can understand you without a demonstration. You say you quarrelled?"

"It was this way. Just one minute. I won't hurt you. I must show you how it was, Captain George."

But Gentleman George was still of the

opinion that he did not want to feel the long hands of the old Amazon at his throat, so he fell back, looking at her with innate fear.

"Where is he?" he asked.

"Where I left him."

"Of course. But they will find the body, woman. The police will discover it, and then—"

"Who will tell them? You?"

"No, no!"

"Who, then? Old Mercy? Not much!"

She laughed.

The Showman-Sport threw a glance toward the door, as if to see whether it was shut. The key was in the lock and he could possess himself of it in a moment, if necessary.

"Tell me now what happened in the other nest that night," he said. "You placed the death envelope in some man's way."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes. We found the scar of the bomb on the table-cloth. You and Logan exploded it."

"He did it himself—the eager spy."

"A spy? I thought so."

"It was strange—the strangest thing I ever heard of. He came to the house and we consulted. In a little while we concluded he was a spy—a watch-dog, or a wolf on the trail. It mattered little which. He said he came from you and Gopher. He knew something about the documents we were guarding; he wanted to look at them to settle a dispute. We got them for the spy—"

"Knowing what he was?" broke in Farrell.

"Yes. We had him in our hands, don't you see? The little envelope which you called the death-agent when you placed it in our hands would tempt any one. We gave him the papers and left him alone in the room. Why not, you see? Wasn't he in our power, and if the powder failed, hadn't I these?" and again she thrust her terrible hands into George's face.

"Go on!" he cried. "He tugged at the envelope, did he?"

"Yes. Bless you, he just couldn't help it. It was made to catch the coolest. Ha, ha, it caught him."

"Well?"

George waited, consumed with chagrin till the old woman had ceased laughing.

"Then came our surprise!" she said. "The powder flashed up in his face and we dropped the curtain to avoid the deadly vapors. We stood behind it till all was quiet in the room and then ventured to look in. There was no one there."

"My God, woman!" cried Farrell. "You don't tell me that the man had carried off the documents?"

"Nothing was there in the shape of humanity or documents," coolly answered Mercy. "The powder left some stains on the table-cloth, as you discovered; but the man had vanished. Then we vanished also."

"Without looking for him?"

"We found a trail to the door. There was a little blood on the lintel, nothing more."

"Why didn't you hunt me up?"

"That was Logan's fault. He wouldn't let me. We had to find another nest and keep the secret. But we had a little quarrel, and I have told you that he is dead."

"What next?"

Mercy held out one of her long hands, and Gentleman George looked first at it and then into her chocolate-colored face.

"I must go. I want money," said Mercy.

"I have none, woman."

The old face seemed to grow white and the hand shut like the jaws of a tigress.

"Money!"

"But you can't rob a beggar," said Farrell.

The cry was repeated with emphasis, and the Showman-Sport instinctively laid his hand on the back of a chair.



"I want five hundred dollars!" hissed old Mercy.

"I haven't five hundred cents."

"And yet you have had Harold Hart's millions poured into your coffers! You tell me, your old slave and tool, that you have no money when you have had him for your backer. Who killed him, George Farrell?"

"You mustn't ask me that, woman."

"But I do. You won't answer, eh? Well, I will."

"You?"

"I! I will answer the question to the police."

"And who will tell the story of old Logan's death?"

Instead of turning white again, Mercy broke into a derisive laugh.

"If you don't pay me I'll tell that myself," she exclaimed. "It is the five hundred or the police. Wait! I can do better than that. I can tell the spy who ran off with the papers."

"But you might not be able to find him."

"I saw him within the hour."

"The man who escaped the action of the deadly envelope?"

"The same person. I know him!"

For a moment Gentleman George did not know just how to take this declaration, but the old woman flashed on:

"I can lay my hands on him at any time. I know where he lives under a new name since the visit to the den. I can find the spy whenever I care to unearth him. It is the spy or the five hundred. I am very desperate. Think of the old form lying in a dark room, just as I left it awhile ago."

"You are a demoness," said Farrell. "I can't compromise with you, Mercy. You are a murderess. You have killed your—"

She threw up her hands and Farrell stopped.

"Not another word!" cried the old creature. "They can't cheat me out of many days. You won't let me elude them. You refuse the five hundred? Then let the hand of justice descend upon those on whose flesh is the blood of Harold Hart, the millionaire clown. I will set the trap, and he—Spangles—shall spring it."

She sprang past the Showman-Sport and gained the door; she looked back from the threshold, and when he reached it he received a stunning blow from her open hand—a blow that stung.

#### CHAPTER XXIII.

##### THE TRAIL OF THE VIPER.

A boy lying on a cot in a hospital was moaning like one in mortal agony.

Buttons had come to after his startling adventure in the hands of the two men, only to fall, as we have seen, on the street, to be carried to the emergency hospital in the ambulance.

His wound was pronounced dangerous.

More than once Buttons had mentioned "Joe" and "Spangles" in the same breath, and, with some lucid spells, the long night passed.

It was the next day, and the sun, shining into the ward where the boy lay moaning, rendered paler than ever his drawn face, and one of the attendants watched him with earnest solicitude.

"When will Spangles come?" asked Buttons.

"Who is Spangles, boy? Is there really a person with that name, or have you dreamed it?" demanded the nurse.

"You don't know Spangles—the ferret, the cool Spangles, with a hand that sticks to a boy like me? That's funny. But you've seen the name in the papers?"

"I don't recall it."

"That's because you were looking for something else. I want to see Spangles;" and then Buttons, after a pause, continued:

"Will my flare-up get into the newspapers?"

"I think it will."

"That will put Spangles onto me;" and the face of Buttons flushed a little.

"He'll see it, for nothing escapes him."

Just then one of the surgeons came down the aisle accompanied by some one.

"That is Buttons," said the surgeon's companion, and the next moment the boy nearly sprang erect.

"It's Spangles! I knowed he'd come! You saw it in the newspapers, didn't you, Cyrus?"

The new comer drew a chair close to the couch and sat down, holding Buttons' hand.

"Will it worry him to talk?" asked the detective.

"Not if he doesn't excite himself."

"I'll keep him toned down," smiled Spangles, and the attendants withdrew, leaving the two friends alone.

"I was right in it last night, Spangles," said the boy. "You never saw a trap like the one they've got."

"Who were they, Buttons?"

"Gentleman George and Gopher Goldstar. It was a jump for life and a run for my very teeth."

"But they got you?"

"Yes, yes. It was a shot in the dark, almost; but I didn't let it stop me in the yard."

"Tell me all, Buttons; but tell it slowly. They say you're better, and that you're going to pull through."

"You're pulling me through, Spangles," smiled the boy. "Since you've come I'm bound to pull through."

Then for at least ten minutes the only sound heard in that particular spot was the measured voice of Buttons as, looking up into the detective's face, he told the story of his thrilling adventures in the old house.

It was a fascinating narrative for Spangles, and he did not interrupt Buttons once.

When the boy stopped he looked into the eyes above him and seemed to study them.

"It's another link, Buttons," said Spangles.

"Is it? That's good. You'll put all the links together, by and by, won't you, Spangles?"

"Yes."

"I knew it. You see, they wanted me to tell where I took Joe Vincent."

"Well, Buttons, where did you take Joe?"

"He hasn't seen you, has he?"

"No."

"And you don't know anything about the tunnel and the movable stone?"

"What tunnel, Buttons?"

"The one underneath the old house, which I believe belonged to Harold Hart, the rich man who backed the Great American and got killed for it."

"I know nothing of the tunnel—nothing of the movable stone, for I haven't seen Joe to learn the secret."

"Well, you've got it now. It's on N—street, that house is, not far from the river and close to one of the big sewers."

"Harold Hart owned property in various parts of the city, and may have owned some there."

"If he did, don't you see, the person who came to the tunnel and carried off what was behind the stone knew all about the lay of the land."

"That is true. Did you really see the person who came?"

"I got a good look at her."

"Good enough to satisfy you that she was Floss, Harold Hart's ward?"

"I don't like to connect the girl with the matter in any shape, Spangles; but I say that she came to the tunnel."

"What did Joe say?"

"It knocked him silly," grinned the boy, forgetful of his hurts. "There she stood in the light of her match, the tall girl with the cold face and icy look—the face she always shows, even in the park where I sometimes see her. It surely was Floss, Spangles."

A few more questions sufficed to round out the interview, and then the Circus

Detective rose and held the boy's hand ere he said good-by.

"Look out, Spangles. If they think you're close onto the game they will give you trouble. They'll set all manner o' traps for you. They'll see that Spangles the Detective never reaches the end of the trail."

The boy's gaze followed Spangles until the figure of the ferret vanished.

A few minutes later a figure not very unlike Spangles might have been seen standing in the shadows of a tall building not very far from a man who seemed to be waiting for some one to emerge from a down-town hotel.

Presently a man came out and the two met.

Spangles saw the meeting, but could not overhear what passed between them.

"Still in the conspiracy," thought the detective, when the couple separated, and then he walked away himself.

"I'll look for Gloster now. He wasn't at home when I called last."

Spangles turned up shortly afterward in the vicinity of Gloster Turk's abode, and the door opened at his first rap.

Gloster fell back, with his hand on the latch and looked at his caller a full minute before he caught the Spangles smile.

"Just in time. I'll have a caller in a few moments."

"Here, Gloster?"

"Yes. It's about the hour now. There, he's on the steps now," and Old Gloster pushed his visitor across the room and opened a door on the opposite side.

"There's a hole on a level with your eye, and you can do the rest," he said hastily.

As the door of the little room was closed Gloster Turk fell back, and Spangles put his keen eye to the place indicated by the old necklace maker.

At that moment the door in the large room opened and a man came in.

Gloster welcomed him in a fervent manner, asking him how the Great American Circus progressed.

It was Gentleman George, sleekly dressed and looking for all the world like a gentleman who has made a lucky ten-strike.

"I did hear that you're back in the city and out of the show business," said old Gloster.

"For the present," answered George. "We'll get on the road again, and make things hum."

"You don't come to see me very often," remarked the necklace maker.

"No. Not as often as I should, perhaps. You will pardon me if I say that my present visit is a business one."

"That's all right, George. What can an old man like me do for you?"

"I want to ask you one or two questions which may seem a bit impertinent."

"Go ahead with your questioning."

"You knew Harold Hart very well, didn't you?" asked George.

"Harold Hart, the man who was found dead in his library a few days ago?"

"Yes."

"I used to know him."

"I thought so. You knew him before he struck it rich, or when he was on the road?"

In an instant the whole mien of Gloster Turk seemed to change.

"What has that got to do with the present visit of yours?" he asked.

"A good deal. I want a little information. I am interested to some extent in the fair girl he left behind. He was married once, was Harold Hart."

"He was."

"His wife did not live very long after the marriage?"

"No."

"She presented Harold Hart with a child who vanished soon after birth."

"You know that, do you?" and old Gloster seemed to lean toward George Farrell.

"It's not a very close secret," was the



reply, "though the sex of the child is somewhat of a mystery."

"It seems to be," affirmed Gloster.

"Very well. Now, look here, Gloster. You don't make a great deal of money at your business here?"

"Not much, George."

In another moment sleek George Farrell had his hand on the necklace maker's knee.

"Now then, Gloster, if I make it interesting for you—no insignificant sum—won't you help to prove that that child was a girl?"

"But it wasn't—"

"Never mind that, man. For my purpose that child must be a girl. Say the word, and I'll make a very Midas out of you. Your oath would fix the whole matter. It would virtually settle the whole affair."

"But there's the murder!"

"To styx with that!" cried George Farrell, quickly.

#### CHAPTER XXIV. A COOL PROPOSITION.

Gloster Turk made no reply for a moment, but watched his visitor with his keen, hawk-like eyes.

"I'm not discussing the tragedy of the library," continued Gentleman George; "I'm talking about the bargain I would make with you. You can be the richest man of your profession in New York if you but take fortune at its flood and make a little effort. All I want is proof that the missing child was a daughter, and if you help me out, why, I'll make it doubly interesting."

"Tell me just what you want, and maybe I can see my way clear to assist you."

Farrell took hope. He seemed to go over his piece in silence and then settle on the trend of the story he wanted to tell.

"You see, Gloster, if we can make out that the missing child was a daughter it means a lot of gold for both of us, and we're all after that. I can produce the proper heir at the right time, provided you come forward and tell the story that will settle the whole matter."

"But, in order to do that I would have to go back in my own life a few years."

"Certainly. You will have to unmask yourself a little, and the city will discover that Gloster Turk has been masquerading under a borrowed name for some years. That won't be hard to do; and the result will justify the effort. You knew Harold Hart when he was a clown, long before he got to be so rich and one of the queerest speculators in stocks. He made money hand over fist, and, with the cold-faced beauty who lived with him, he established a strange reputation, while few suspected that he ever rode a circus steed."

"But he did," exclaimed Gloster. "In his day he was one of the best of the old tumblers and clowns. I suspect it was his love for old times that made him back the Great American Circus."

"Partly from that," said the Showman-Sport. "Now, don't you see, if we can prove that the lost child was a daughter, say the one whom he raised—Floss—why, our nest's feathered."

"But the boy might step in."

"Never. I'll see to that."

"There's a little risk," answered Gloster. "I might come forward at the proper time and make an oath that the child was a girl, just as you suggest, and after all the other side may bring forward proof which might knock us out."

"Fiddlesticks! There'll be no other side, or, at least, it won't materialize. What I want is your word. You knew him; you remember the birth of the heir; you remember, also, the theft and the hunt for that child."

"Distinctly," said old Gloster, crossing his legs and sending his first glance toward the little room where the detective was hidden. "It was an exciting time then."

"Wasn't it?" grinned the plotter. "They hunted for a long time; even dragged the creeks and scoured the woods. I remember it; but the epidemic which swept over the country some years afterward nearly depopulated it, and I'm told that no one who lived there at the time of the tragedy now survives but yourself."

"I guess I am the only survivor, and I escaped by coming to this city."

"No doubt of that. Now, Gloster, you know what I want, and you can make up the little story unmolested. I'll drop in again to-morrow and compare notes with you."

George crossed the room, but stopped at the door and looked back.

"One word," said he. "You haven't seen this Spangles lately, have you?"

Gloster shook his head.

"He would be likely to call if in the city, wouldn't he?"

"Quite likely. He always called. Do you know him?"

"No. I understand that he is the main detective on the Harold Hart mystery; but he doesn't seem to be making much headway."

The knob was turned and in another moment George Farrell was in the little hall beyond the portal.

Gloster followed him to the door, saw him on the street, and then came back.

At the same moment a door opened, and Spangles stepped into view.

"You entertained him very well, Gloster," said the Circus Detective.

"I tried to," was the reply. "That was a cool proposition of his, eh?"

"But in keeping with other chapters in his life. George Farrell might have received a shock if he could have looked into the room yonder."

"But he didn't see you, which is good," cried the necklace maker. "You'll help me make up my story, won't you?"

Gloster Turk sat down and drew a bit of paper toward him.

"He wants you to come forward when he has everything ready and make oath that the child stolen from his cradle long ago when his father was not so well known as he afterward became was not a boy, but a girl," said Spangles. "That's it."

"And, what is more, he intends to make that girl turn out to be Floss, and she is Harold Hart's heir now."

"She is, if the lost child doesn't turn up!"

Old Gloster opened his eyes.

"I see," he said. "If the boy never turns up she will get the fortune, but if she turns out to be the missing child, why, it's hers in spite of fate."

"That's the idea exactly. If Harold Hart had lived he might at some time have left on record the fact that the lost heir was not a girl; but he can't do that now."

"Who was suspected of stealing the boy?"

"A man called Manson, but that wasn't his name."

"It was a case of revenge, wasn't it?"

"Partly that. Manson hated Harold Hart because he got the best of him in a love affair. He was a cool fellow, was this Mark Manson, a cold-hearted wretch who never stopped for anything. I saw him often those days, but, after the crime I lost sight of him entirely."

"And Hart's wife—the mother of the missing child?"

"She vanished. That was the strangest event connected with those crimes. She disappeared a year after the crime, and that's what drove Harold Hart to the ring."

"I have heard as much hinted elsewhere," said the detective. "It took him on the road partly from a burning desire to find his wife and the man suspected of taking the child."

"But he never found either."

"What became of the wife?"

"She died in a northern city, leaving to a certain person the true story of her identity."

"Who is that person, Gloster?"

"She told her story to one of two men. She told it to George Farrell or Gopher Goldstar."

"I thought as much," exclaimed the ferret. "And now this gilt-edged scoundrel comes to you and wants you to help him clinch the fortune by perjury."

"That's his proposition boiled down," smiled Gloster. "There never was one just like it in the world."

"And never a scamp with all his cunning," answered the detective. "You will have the story ready for him to-morrow, won't you?"

"You don't mean that, Spangles?"

"Why not? He's promised to make a Midas of you."

"I don't want to become rich in that manner."

"He can make you famous. He has it in his power to make you an envied person, but, at the same time, Gloster, if the tide turns, he may engulf you."

"I know that. Just look at the coolness of the rascal. I can't see through his intentions, for he hasn't much show to get his hands on Harold Hart's fortune, even if he proves that Floss is the real heir, unless—"

The necklace-maker paused and passed his long dark hand over his brow.

"It can hardly be that he intends to make her his wife," cried he, suddenly.

"That would be a winning card, wouldn't it?"

"It would! it would!"

"With himself thus feathered there may be a successor to the Great American. Who knows but that it may become the greatest show in the world?"

"There would be a cool million behind it," said Gloster, reflectively. "But Floss might not care to become his wife."

"She may be so badgered as to lose her nerve and willingly become Mrs. George Farrell."

For a little while the old man sat silent before the detective, and then he suddenly looked up and caught his eye.

"What have you found out?" he asked.

"I've picked up a few links."

"Who killed the man found dead in the steel safe? You opened it, I believe."

"The newspapers have solved that riddle to their satisfaction."

"I know they think they have. They charge that crime upon Harold Hart."

"Yes."

"But what proof have they? He was found dead in the safe, but the hands that forced him into it may not have been Harold Hart's. I know the proof is against the dead man—the millionaire clown—but I'm not satisfied. Nathan Moneybox was not a pleasant visitor to Harold; I know that. He went thither that night for a purpose. He knew enough to make some threats, provided things didn't come his way. He was an old reprobate who had a secret which he thrust out in a measure whenever he wanted a little extra cash."

"That secret was against the man he visited."

"It was. No doubt he threatened Harold Hart that night. That was the man all over. He might have threatened a little harder than on previous calls and got the steel safe for his last prison."

"It looks that way. Everything points to a tragedy of this kind," replied Spangles.

"But the girl—Floss—must know more than she has told," cried Gloster. "You must sound her—push her to the wall. She is cold-hearted, which goes to show that she never had a drop of Hart blood in her veins. I'll have a story for Farrell when he comes, if he ever comes back for it."

"He will come," confidently answered Spangles, the ferret. "Toll this man on, Gloster. He is very cool, and if he catches you in a falsehood he's liable to play a very unexpected hand."

"You want me to swear to this abominable story, do you?"



"Not quite that far," smiled Spangles. "If I can help it you will never be required to carry the joke this far. Toll him on, I say. The missing heir was a girl! She was stolen from her cradle by a man supposed to be Mark Manson. By the way, whatever became of this suspect?"

"Oh, he's dead. He died at the gaming table."

"Then he'll not trouble Farrell with a confession, and he won't interfere with your story."

"Of course not."

Spangles, the detective, stood once more on the street with the little room and its singular occupant behind him.

His face seemed no index to his thoughts, which must have been busy, and he walked away with agile step.

"I am picking up a link now and then," said he to himself. "It is a strange trail and deeper than I suspected. But the last link is the best one. With one or two more in my hands I shall forge the chain against the guilty, and Gotham will receive a double surprise."

## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE FERRET'S EXECUTIONER.

There was one thing connected with the story told by Buttons from his cot in the hospital that interested Spangles more than anything else.

This was the adventure in the tunnel, the visit of Floss Hart to the place and the theft of the papers behind the dated stone.

The detective, after quitting Gloster Turk, resolved to visit the spot himself, and thitherward directed his steps.

In a short time he stood under the roof, having effected an entrance from the rear, and presently he opened the door leading to the underground passage.

The place was dark and forbidding enough, but this did not discourage the ferret.

The way seemed open for him, and following Buttons's directions he soon found himself in the tunnel.

He felt the moistened walls and inhaled the foul air that pervaded the place, but on he went, eager to see the dated stone and perhaps run his hand into the dark opening behind it.

Far down the tunnel he struck a light and held it above his head.

A puff of air from the main sewer flared the little flame and he shielded it with his hand.

The stone was back in its place as Buttons had first described it, and the eager detective thrust up his light and breathlessly read the same inscription in black.

He at last let the match go out and began to tug at the stone itself.

It yielded after some work, and he succeeded in taking it from its place and gently lowered it to the flagging of the old tunnel.

In another instant he had thrust his right hand into the opening above his head.

At first it touched nothing, and then his fingers felt a bit of damp paper.

Eager for anything the hole would yield, the detective drew this forth and again lit his match.

It was a folded paper, with signs of having been tied at one time, but now the string was missing, and nothing but the creases made by it remained.

Spangles put the paper in his pocket and explored the hole again.

Nothing else rewarded him, and after a while he lifted the stone back to its place and prepared to quit the passage.

But at that moment a slight noise up the darkened way startled him.

The detective hugged the wall of the tunnel and held his breath, as the door at the end of the corridor opened, and his ears caught the sound of footsteps.

Some one was coming toward him.

The feet of the unseen flitted along

over the stone, now and then scarcely perceptible in their sounds, and now ringing out distinctly in the ferret's ears.

They stopped where the stone was and Spangles waited for a light that would show him the face and figure of the unseen.

But no light was struck.

He heard some one tugging at the loose stone, and then it seemed to be lifted from its place.

Who was over there?

In vain did the keen-eyed ferret try to penetrate the darkness; he could not see past his own hand.

"There! I have it at last," suddenly spoke a voice, at sound of which Spangles started. "It took a little more strength than I ever had to exert before, but it's up now, and all's well."

In a few minutes the unseen went back up the corridor.

Spangles followed.

Ever on the alert, he was determined to see more of his adventure, and as he slipped over the damp flags of the corridor his eagerness became intense.

The door ahead opened and closed, and he heard to his sorrow the turn of a key in a lock.

"It's better to lock it," said a voice beyond the portal. "I don't think any one will come down here, but a lock's the best security in a case of this kind."

It was a voice that had a familiar sound, and the detective stood at the portal shut in the corridor with a strange visitor about to give him the slip.

"Never mind, I can rob the stone," said Spangles. "She can't get ahead of me very much, after all."

He turned back and almost ran down the tunnel. When he thought he had reached the vicinity of the movable stone he paused and struck a light.

"She has eyes like an owl," thought Spangles, as he spied the dated stone. "But what's this?"

The match showed him a dark line drawn through the inscription, and underneath it some words which showed that they had been written in the dark.

The Circus Spotter held his breath as he stood on tip-toe and held the light close to the gray surface of the loose stone.

The new inscription stood out before his eyes like letters in relief, and not one of them escaped his eyes.

He read simply this—simply, we say, for the inscription was brief—but it was almost too terrible to believe.

"Cyrus Spangles. Died April 18th, 18—"

It was the date that flashed across his mind like an electric bolt, for that very day was the 18th.

Spangles looked at the inscription till it seemed to quit the hard, cold surface of the rock and come to meet him. It appeared eager to brand itself on his forehead, and with a cry he could not suppress he dropped his flaring light and fell back to the opposite wall.

Darkness denser than ever seemed to fill the tunnel, and the silence which came down over the scene was its proper mate.

His own doom had been decreed; not only this, but the date of it had already been recorded on stone, and probably he had stood within a few feet of the assassin.

Spangles thought of a thousand-and-one things in the space of a breath.

His heart beat fast, and he went back over the mystery trail from the first step to the present moment. He recalled the adventures he had had since taking up the thread of crime in Harold Hart's library; the opening of the safe in presence of Floss, the ice-hearted heiress, the finding there of Nathan Moneybox, the short life of the Great American Circus on the road, his return to New York, the encounter with Nevis, the maid, in the house of the tragedy, the man on the stairs, the shots, the pit from which he had escaped—in short,

all this and more came back to him with wonderful emphasis.

His brain for a moment seemed on fire in the darkness.

"But what did she deposit behind the stone?" he suddenly thought.

Reaching up, he pulled the gray stone out to let it fall at his feet, while he straightened to light another match.

Spangles was all mettle now; he thrust his hand into the hole, gripped a packet of some kind and pulled it forth.

"I thought so!" he exclaimed. "This creature has overreached herself. She has played a hand which shall beat her out of the stakes in the end."

That which he held in his hand seemed to be a package of letters, but he put it in his pocket all the same, and lifted the stone back to its place, then he turned away and started, not toward the door which he had heard locked, but toward the main sewer which Buttons had described to him.

Spangles found the opening, and in a short time was pushing toward the street-rat's opening, from which he emerged with the filth of the sewer on his garments, but with the package in his pocket.

Spangles still felt the excitement of his last adventure, then he turned the corner and came face to face with the house in which it had opened.

It looked silent and innocent enough to be the abode of love, but he smiled when he recalled what he had seen beyond its portals within the last hour.

In a short time the detective in the case was seated at a table in a small room looking at some papers which he had released from confinement by cutting a string.

He had read one by one the documents for half an hour and his eyes told that he had picked up another link.

"No wonder these papers were to be buried," said the Circus Detective. "She wanted them hidden, perhaps forever, behind the stone. Just why she didn't burn them is somewhat of a mystery, but she knows why she did not. She may tell me one of these days."

He read on till the little clock on a shelf across the room struck another half hour, when he dropped the last paper and settled back in his chair.

"Joe would start if he could read what I have just finished," muttered the Spotter. "He would not believe at first, but there's all the proof he wants. There's a complete refutation of Gopher's insinuation, that he came from the gutters. But it will all be told now. The last quarter of the race is being run and if I escape the doom they have reserved for me—for this is the 18th—I will stand at the end of the great trail of the year."

Spangles gathered up the papers and put them in a secret receptacle in the wall which was not visible from any part of the room. Then he came back to the table and resumed his seat.

Ten minutes drifted on, the clock ticking them away distinctly while Spangles wrote with his body bent slightly forward, and the light falling on the sheet before him.

"Who's to do it, I wonder?" he asked himself, as he paused a moment. "The person who came to the tunnel and undoubtedly left the new date on the stone? Am I marked to fall by her hands? Has the fair one been selected for this work, and must I play into the trap she may have set for me? We will see, witch of darkness and cunning."

The laugh which bubbled to the ferret's lips was suddenly broken by footsteps beyond his door.

He waited for the knock, and it came softly and half timidly to his ears.

Spangles was looking for no visitor just then, and he crossed the room with wonderment in his eyes.

In another moment he had opened the door and he held it open for the person there to come in.

And who was there? Spangles let a



little smile gather at his lips, while he gazed at his caller. He caught sight of the half hidden hand, which to him seemed to grip a dagger, but he did not betray himself.

"Come in," said he, cleverly. "I was not expecting you, Miss Floss, but, nevertheless you are welcome here."

The girl crossed the threshold and stepped lightly forward and as she turned upon the detective in the middle of the room their eyes fairly met.

"This is the executioner," thought Spangles, the Spotter. "This girl has come for my life."

#### CHAPTER XXVI.

##### THE SHOWMAN-SPORT TAKES THE TRAIL.

About the same hour of Floss's visit at the detective's lodgings there entered into a room further up town and in a comfortable locality already boasting of some notoriety a man who seemed half caller and half owner.

This person with the cleverness of the always-at-home sport threw himself into a chair and spread his arms over the back of it as if he intended to wait for some one.

The room was shaded and cool, the thick curtains keeping out both light and heat, and while he waited his gaze wandered around the chamber.

No one came in.

Not only this, but the whole house seemed deserted, for not a sound came to the man's ears from any part of the house.

"She can't be in," said he at length, shifting uneasily in the chair. "I don't know but that I had best take a survey of the premises, and if I'm the only tenant just now I may extend my explorations."

He left the room and crossed the hall to a door which he opened with some caution.

The room thus entered was a library, high-ceiled, well-carpeted and richly-furnished.

At one side of the room stood a large steel-doored safe with its shining knob of the same material.

This at once caught the man's eye and he walked over to it without hesitation.

Gopher Goldstar, for the man was the head manager of the Great American Circus, as the reader would discover in a little while, twisted the shining steel knob as if to see whether the safe was locked.

"Why not?" said he, in low, but audible tones. "She can't be at home, else she would have been down before this. I have the power to look beyond this door and why not do so?"

He gave the safe more attention from that moment, for he knelt on the rug before it and listened as he moved the handle.

"I knew the old combination," he went on. "Can it be that she has changed it, or has she respected his last combination?"

Even as he spoke the handle seemed to yield to his manipulations, and then he swung the heavy door open.

"A small place in which to die," he said, as he took a survey of the interior of the safe. "He didn't last long here; he could not. It was over almost in the twinkling of an eye."

The next moment he was engaged in looking into the various drawers of the steel safe.

He carefully lifted and turned papers over as if he was looking for something which appeared very elusive.

"Not here. She may have gone through it," he muttered at last. "I understand that she knew the combination. If so, she has lost no time and—"

He paused suddenly, for a slight noise beyond the door of the library startled him, and he swung the safe door shut.

In another moment he was on his feet looking anxiously across the room as if he expected to see the door open in his face.

All at once he stepped forward and

opened the door himself. A slight scream rewarded him.

"You, is it?" he exclaimed, laying hold of the tall girl, who stood white-faced in the hall in the act of flight.

"Where did you come from, girl?"

"This is my home, don't you know?"

"But you have come in within the last few minutes? Where's Miss Floss?"

Nevis, the maid, shook her head.

"She hasn't come down yet, perhaps," said Gopher. "You don't deny that you haven't been in the house long?"

"No."

"I've been waiting for your mistress. Go up and tell her. No, you needn't mind it. I guess she isn't in."

"She isn't," said Nevis, with some trepidation, as she looked into the eyes that transfixed her.

Goldstar did not relinquish his hold on the tall maid's arm, but pulled her into the library and shut the door.

He pushed her into a chair in a manner that nearly made her teeth chatter.

"Did you see Mr. Farrell during his last visit here?" demanded Gopher.

"I did not. I haven't been here very lately," protested Nevis. "I went away, and this is my first visit back. I fled to escape a man whom I do not like."

"Name him."

"He was one of those detectives who have made life a burden to us ever since the double tragedy. He persecuted me till, to escape the man, I fled the house."

"Which one was it?"

"They call him Spangles, I believe."

"Did he try to make you retract your old story and give him something new?"

"Yes, yes."

"Well, he won't bother you again, Nevis, so rest easy on that score. But answer me: How did Mr. George Farrell win the play in this house?"

"If he won a play here it is news to me."

"He has won your mistress, Nevis."

"Floss? Impossible!—I thought—"

"Why don't you go on?"

"I thought she preferred you—there!" cried the maid. "You see, Floss has been under a terrible strain ever since the double mystery, and she hasn't had time to make a confidant of me, but a woman can see some things that are not spoken."

"Good! And you've been using your eyes in this house, girl?"

"A little," confessed Nevis.

Gopher seemed to take a long breath, and his gaze wandered across the room to the steel safe.

"What do you remember about that night?" he asked. "You were at home that night?—and heard noises in the library?"

"I've told that before."

"Of course. You saw the old man come in, didn't you?"

"The other one?" asked Nevis.

"Yes. The one who tumbled out of the safe when the detective unlocked it."

"I saw him in the library with Harold Hart. They were over there at the desk."

"What did you hear, girl?"

Nevis seemed to recoil, for she laid her hands on the arms of the chair as if about to quit it, but a glance from Gopher held her down.

"Who else came here that night?" he asked, his black eyes still riveted on the whitened face before him.

"I cannot say."

"You must tell me all you know. This is the one thing you have withheld from the authorities. To escape telling this you fled from Spangles, the detective, as you have told me. You know who came in after the first crime."

Once more the girl threw an appealing glance toward the door, but Gopher Goldstar was as firm as a rock of adamant.

"Come! Don't make an all-night's job of your silence," he cried. "Who came in after old Nathan entered the steel tomb?"

The maid sprang up and threw out her hands.

"Don't! don't!" she cried. "Don't force me further in this matter. I have been troubled ever since with the secret, and I don't want to talk. You must let me go."

Gopher Goldstar threw out his hands and caught her wrists:

"You must name him!" he almost hissed. "It shall not get you into trouble. The avenging will be as secret as was the other affair. You shall not be dragged into court. But, girl, you shall not quit this room till I know. Quick! Name that man," he commanded.

Nevis turned white, and her lips fell apart in a cry.

"It was Gentleman George. There! for God's sake, let me go now," and, as Goldstar's grip loosened she staggered across the room and fled into the hall.

#### CHAPTER XXVI.

##### THE PLUNDERED SPOTTER.

Alone with Floss Hart, who had found him in his lodgings, Spangles felt that the woman was his enemy and self-constituted executioner, and he watched Floss as she came forward with the mien and the noiseless tread of a pantheress.

But all at once the cold-faced woman seemed to change her mind, for suddenly she whirled around and sprang to the door again.

The detective watched her till she reached the portal, and when her hand had turned the knob, he spoke:

"One moment, Miss Floss. I want to see you."

She threw a look over her shoulder, but did not stop. She appeared to be controlled by fright—fright which she could not drive away—for she threw wide the door and was gone.

Spangles looked after her, but did not seek to stop her again.

Down on the street Floss Hart looked up at the detective's window and took a long breath.

She acted like one who had escaped danger by a narrow margin, but her white cheeks did not flush.

Spangles went to the window and looked down into the street, but missed the figure that flitted away.

"Her nerve failed her at the supreme moment," said he, as he retraced his steps. "She came here to end my trail, but she lost nerve just when she needed it most for her purpose."

The detective laughed at the end of his sentences and went down on the street.

Of course the girl who had so strangely visited him and then escaped was out of sight, and he looked in vain for her, half expecting all the time to catch sight of her well-known figure, or to hear suddenly behind him her step on the pavement.

But the detective was not rewarded.

It was not long after this adventure that Spangles turned up elsewhere, and stood before Joe Vincent.

The young acrobat reclined on a settee in his own lodgings, and for some time the two friends sat in silence, as if neither cared to open the conversation.

At last Joe asked:

"Have you found the missing link, Spangles?"

Spangles looked over at his friend and his face seemed to get a look of deep sympathy.

Joe noticed it.

"There," said he. "Don't look so sympathetic, Spangles. I don't need much sympathy, after all. I once had Gopher Goldstar by the throat, and yet I spared the lying rascal. It was my fault. And how often did I have a chance to make him retract during the brief existence of the Great American Circus!"

Spangles leaned toward the occupant of the settee, and for a moment longer looked steadily into his face.

"What have you found out about the parental trail?"

Joe started with a sharp cry, and settled back on the settee.



"Alas, nothing," said he. "I am baffled at every turn and know not which way to look nor what to do. The man who might have known something, for he was an old-time showman, is dead, and you are on the trail of the murderer. Harold Hart cannot speak, and even if he could he might not tell me anything."

"What about the heiress, Joe?"

"Why ask me about her? She is nothing to me. She has fallen heir to Harold Hart's wealth, and in time will take a husband, and she will see that none of it sticks to his fingers."

"She has chosen already."

Joe, who was all attention, did not seem to breathe now.

"Who is the lucky man?" he asked.

"It is George Farrell."

"Our old employer?" laughed Joe. "I wish him happiness, but she can't love him. That girl will never love any one."

"But she is to wed Gentleman George, as you call him."

"It means more than a mere match," said Joe. "It means something deeper than the outward scheme. Floss is cool and he is no man's fool."

"What think you it means, Joe?"

The young showman shook his head in a puzzled manner.

"It is an alliance of some kind," he went on. "I am satisfied of that; but there I stop."

Spangles's face seemed to light up with the possession of a secret.

"If Floss is proven Harold Hart's child—not merely his ward—"

"What's that, Spangles?" interrupted the young showman. "You don't mean to tell me that she was his child?"

"I say if she proves that she was—"

"They must lie to prove that?"

"George and Floss, you mean?"

Spangles nodded and Joe sprang up and came over to him.

"Tell me what you've found out," he cried, his hand falling upon the ferret's shoulder. "You have filled me with impatience; I am burning with a desire to know more about this new scheme. It means much. Floss to become the bride of George Farrell? It is almost amusing, for I can't see where Gopher Goldstar comes in."

"Oh, he's been ruled out—that's all," laughed the detective. "Goldstar missed his opportunity and Farrell won the game. Now, Joe, you must keep your nerve."

"I'll keep it, Spangles. No danger of my losing it at this stage of the play."

"You must let nothing upset you—you must remain cool under all circumstances, for something startling may turn up and you may be required to undergo a thrilling ordeal."

Joe Vincent's gaze did not quit the detective's face while the latter spoke, and Spangles finished in an undertone.

"When will I know?" asked the acrobat.

"Before long," was the answer.

"You have unexpectedly picked up a link not directly connected with the double mystery of the library."

"Wait and see."

"I'll wait, Spangles, but make no mistake. Remember, nowadays you must have solid proof to convince the world."

"I'll have no other kind when I play my hand."

"Good!" cried Joe. "You are trumps, Spangles. But, as I told you once before, look out. If Jack Fontenoy comes into the game again the pair may not get off as easily as they did that night after the show in Pennsylvania. Jack Fontenoy! I thought I saw him on Broadway to-day, but I may have been mistaken."

"He is in the city."

"Here, and for a purpose then!"

"Of course."

"Who is he, Spangles?"

Spangles did not speak for a moment, as if he were making up the proper answer, and Joe's hand again fell upon his shoulder.

"If you don't care to tell, don't," said the showman. "I can wait. Don't you

remember that Jack Fontenoy that night asked George Farrell what had become of Lucy?"

"Yes."

"Well, I have wondered a thousand times who 'Lucy' was."

"Well?"

"I can reach but the one conclusion, and it always comes to me in spite of my thoughts. 'Lucy,' pardon me, Spangles—'Lucy' must have been my mother."

The detective averted his face a little, and Joe did not catch the singular light that flushed it for an instant.

"Never mind. It may be only a fruitless conjecture, but for all this, the idea comes to me at unbidden times, and whenever I think of Jack Fontenoy the same thought recurs. My mother is a dream to me. I have no recollection of her. I was thrown onto the world at an early age, and first chapters in my life are lost. You know that, Spangles. I keep no secrets from you. I could not if I would. But the time must come when I will read that lost chapter. I have looked to you to help me recover it. Don't forget that, Spangles. And if I were to lose you I would be lost myself."

Spangles seemed anxious to get away, and in a little while he stood once more on the street.

"Joe is anxious, yet fearful," thought he. "If he could read the papers Floss Hart buried in the hole in the tunnel he would almost lose his head."

Spangles did not go back to his lodgings immediately, but an hour later he opened his door and walked into the little room.

He struck a light, it being well filled with shadows, and had reached the table when he suddenly stopped.

The faint odor of a singular perfume assailed his nostrils and he sniffed the air half suspiciously.

As the gas was turned on the flame quivered a little and Spangles fell back.

He looked toward the place where he had hidden the documents found in the tunnel and the next second was there.

"Gone. Found out!" he cried.

These expressions came unbidden from the lips of Spangles, the Circus Detective.

He stood at the robbed nest like a man in a dream. He had thought them secure—that no one knew the secret hole in the wall but himself, and that they were perfectly safe.

"I'll see," was all he said, and then the ferret turned and walked to the door.

Had Floss come back? Had the ice beauty of the house of the tragedy robbed him of the most important documents he had ever discovered?

Not another word spoke the man of many trails, but the look of resolution that lit up his eye did not die out.

Spangles left the room, locking the door behind him. He seemed to give new speed to his limbs; something urged him on and on, and at last as he ran up a flight of steps he appeared to have reached his goal.

He paused for just the shadow of a second at the door before him, and then, turning the knob quickly, pushed the portal open and burst into the room ahead.

His visit was greeted by a sharp cry as the figure of a man rose and stood before him.

"What is it?" asked this man.

"A good deal. You must now come to the front."

"I cannot. It is a little too soon. You need not carry out Farrell's plan. You must turn against the villains. I will have them in my hands pretty soon, but you—you, I say—must speak."

"Then I am no longer to be Jack Fontenoy?" said he.

"That's it. I held in my hands the will and the last written documents of Harold Hart. He told the whole story. But I have lost them. You must throw off the mask in the cause of justice."

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### THE PAIR IN THE DARK.

Jack Fontenoy for half a minute looked at the detective, and then deliberately shook his head.

"You want me to come forward and tell my story about the tragedy in another State. You ask me to proclaim that I am not Jack Fontenoy, the Pennsylvanian, but Wilde Winston, the Virginian. That's it, but I say no."

Spangles seemed to draw off a little, but all the while he looked the man squarely in the face.

"Then I go back to the trail," said the spotter. "I have the links in my hands now. I shall startle the city. You refuse to assist the cause of justice."

"It is not that!" cried Fontenoy. "I don't care to unmask myself just yet. Give me a little more time. I will rob them both. I will give you satisfaction."

"I will pull in the net. The mystery of the millionaire's house will be solved within ten hours."

"By you?"

"By me," said Spangles, coolly.

"If they don't entrap you."

"They have done that already, but the trap has failed to hold its victim."

Fontenoy rose and paced the floor, his breathing hard and his face a trifle white.

"I'll tell you," he said, turning suddenly upon Spangles. "You are liable to tarnish his name."

"I can't help that. I intend to go straight to the goal from now on."

"Good luck attend you," said Fontenoy. "If you fail I will try my hand."

"Not before?"

"Perhaps not."

"Then your hand will not appear in the game any more."

The lips of Fontenoy curled derisively and he turned toward the table.

In another minute the figure of Spangles came down the steps and stopped for a little while on the street in front of the house.

"Jack Fontenoy would not tell the story of Lucy because of family pride, but it shall not stop me. I embarked in this puzzle of crime to unravel it, and I shall let nothing balk me."

Thus speaking to himself, he moved away, and in a short time vanished.

Almost at the same time a man not noticed by the Showman-Sport was watching him from the opposite side of the street.

This person had followed him from the very door of Jack Fontenoy's retreat and with keen eyes kept him in sight as he pushed along.

Not for a moment did Spangles elude his unseen tracker, and when he entered his little room once more and shut the door behind him the same keen eyes were at the foot of the stairs.

The detective was nearer the deadly toils than he dreamed in the solitude of his own room.

Down in the lower hall a figure as dark as the shadows there had stationed itself.

It did not move, nor did a single sound escape the unseen lips as the moments waned.

All at once footsteps came to the outer door and it opened to admit some one.

The person in the corner hugged it a little closer and did not seem to breathe.

"I lost my head the last time I faced him," said a voice in a deep whisper.

"He is at home now. I have recovered my nerve. I have a chance to silence this man, whose death I have already recorded. I can go up yonder and strike the moment he opens the door to me."

All this was overheard by the man crouched in the corner of the hall, but still he did not move.

The other one put a foot on the stairs, but stopped suddenly.

"Some one is here," said a voice in the dark. "I feel the presence of some person in this hall. I am not the only one in the gloom here."

Silence followed, and then came a little laugh of fearlessness, as if the person



over whose lips it rippled had shaken off the last vestige of trepidation.

"I was mistaken. I must not lose nerve now. He is within my reach. The ferret who is trying to wreck my life is up-stairs. I have stood before him in that little room and I can find him again. I go up to vengeance."

Up the stairs moved a figure that left but faint sounds for the other person in the dark below.

This one leaned forward out of his corner and listened.

"Why not let her do it? She is all nerve now," he said. "Heavens! what a hold I will have on her."

But that moment the same footsteps came down the stairs and stopped in the hall once more.

"He is moving about. He may come down here," said the same voice. "If he does I can see in the dark, for revenge will direct my hand."

The next moment the speaker stepped from the last step and then brushed the man in the corner.

In another instant a light cry of horror ascended in the dark, and the would-be assassin recoiled to find a hand of steel on a ready arm.

"Don't cry out. I am here," said some one. "You lost nerve at the supreme moment."

"In heaven's name, who are you?"

"Never mind. Have you courage to go up and finish him. If you do not, the jig is up. He knows!"

It was a strange tableau in the darkness of the hallway, and the last sentence seemed to bring out no reply.

"You won't?" said the man. "You have lost courage, sure enough. You deserve to suffer—to fall into the hands of Spangles, the detective."

"I cannot go up there now. I am not myself."

"Just as I told you! Your nerve has cozed out of you through your fingers."

"Let me go. Let the detective play out his hand. He may meet with his mortal enemy some other time."

"Yes, at the bar of justice."

"No, no! Not there! You forget that I will get my old courage back. I will find him. But let me see your face. Take me home."

The man in the hallway opened the door and led the other one out.

On the steps beyond they stopped and looked into each other's face.

There was a cry on the part of the one who had failed to go up to Spangles, the Spotter, and she would have darted from her captor if he had not thrown out a hand.

Without a word they walked from the house and he called a carriage a few doors from the detective's rooms and handed his companion into it.

With the coolness of a desperado he stepped in, too, shut the door, and took a seat at her side.

Already he had given the cabman orders which the woman had not heard.

As the vehicle moved away, deep breathing was heard within; but the sounds of the horses' hoofs on the stones of New York soon drowned it.

A few minutes later the carriage drew up in front of a house a number of squares from the starting point, and the door opened. A woman stepped out and looked back at the vehicle.

It was Floss!

She did not seem to see the face pressed close against the glass of the carriage window, but a face was there.

"My friend, the gentleman, wants to get out on Union Square," she said to the man on the box, and as the horses turned their heads she entered the house.

"He cannot play out his hand if I hold mine well," was all she said when she shut the door, and then she entered a parlor and threw her hat upon a table. "The time has come! Twice I have lost my nerve. This man is closing in on the truth. He has the threads of the dread mystery in his hands, and though I robbed him I will soon be powerless."

At the same moment the carriage rattling over the streets was heading toward Union Square.

The driver did not take heed of his passenger, but looked only to the journey with the last commands of Floss in his mind.

"I guess he's not particular in what part of the Square he is let out," thought Jehu, as he turned into the famous plat. "One place is just as good as another, and she didn't name the spot."

The carriage stopped and the driver leaned from his seat.

"Here we are, sir—Union Square," he shouted; but the door did not open—no one moved inside.

The next moment the driver sprang to the ground and opened the carriage door himself.

A man sat rigid, white-faced and death-like on the cushions with eyes full of vacancy.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE SHOWMAN-SPORT'S PLAY.

If Spangles had not been so busy at the table in his room at the time of Floss's visit to the hall, where she lost her nerve and fell into the hands of Gopher Goldstar, he might have given a different termination to the last chapter; but the cold heiress of Harold Hart's wealth had escaped him.

When he quitted the room it was to cross the city and turn up in a part of it with which he seemed familiar.

The detective was cool and very calm now.

Spangles had a scheme on hand which, if it failed to reward him, might turn the tide of life in an opposite direction and strangely terminate the trail which he had followed since the double mystery of the millionaire showman's house.

The night of the 18th had not passed, and the inscription on the stone in the wall of the tunnel stood out with the same emphasis that had startled him.

Spangles drew up near a house which he fell to watching with a good deal of keenness, and at last he ventured a little closer and mounted the steps.

He gently tried the knob, but it did not turn, then he rang and waited.

Half a minute passed and footsteps sounded in the hall beyond the portal.

The face that greeted the Circus Detective drew back the next moment, but Spangles was not to be beaten off thus.

Pushing the door open, he stepped forward and closed it after him, as he confronted the Cerberus of the place.

"He isn't in, sir," said the raw-boned woman on guard.

"How comes there to be a light in his room?"

"He went out a while ago and left it burning."

Spangles smiled and threw a swift glance down the hall.

"You can't go there!" cried the woman, as a hand fell upon the detective's arm—a hand which he promptly shook off.

Spangles started forward, and heard a sharp cry behind him. He looked back to see the creature springing at him with Amazonian fury.

It was a mad, impulsive charge, and the detective caught the arm as it came down and forced the woman against the wall.

"You must not stop me, woman!" he said, sternly. "You shall not check me now. He is in there—"

"It is false. You are a ferret, and I have my orders."

"Very well. You must not stop me, I say," and Spangles threw her off and started again toward the closed door.

The vixen glared at the spotter, but did not resume the attack. She was not conquered, only checked a little, and her hands twitched nervously as she gazed at the cool face of the detective.

Spangles stopped at the first door down the hall and pushed it open without ceremony.

The woman uttered a cry as he did this, but he did not heed her.

The room beyond the door was a little dark, but here and there streaks of light were scattered around, showing the ferret the interior and its occupant.

It had one.

A man sat in an old-fashioned arm-chair drawn up to a table, and his head had fallen upon his breast as if sleep had suddenly overtaken him.

The detective stopped and looked at this person, a smile forming at his lips as he gazed, for he seemed to recognize him.

He went forward, but the man in the chair did not move.

There was another sound at the door and Spangles, glancing over his shoulder, caught sight of the dark face of the she-Cerberus ere it vanished.

Then he went back and shut the door, locking it securely, to return to the silent tenant of the arm-chair.

If the man was only asleep the hands of Morpheus must have rested heavily upon him, for he did not start even when Spangles touched him.

"Wake up," said the detective, shaking the sleeper. "I have business with you."

Then it was that the eyes unclosed and the ferret saw from their gaze that their owner was under the influence of some noxious drug.

"With me? I don't know you," drowsily said the sleeper.

Spangles shook him again and leaned over him in the chair.

"You ought to know me, Farrell. Don't you remember Mantelli?"

The name seemed to start the other into a little more life, for the old feeling appeared to vanish and he sat bolt upright.

"Mantelli?" echoed he. "Yes, yes. You are the Mantelli of the show?"

"I am your rider. The show is off the road now."

"Yes, yes—gone, broken up."

"And you have come back to the city?"

"Why not? I belong here."

"Of course, but, Farrell, you seem to know me only as Mantelli."

"I know you now," and the chair was pushed back, as everything seemed to dawn upon the man's mind. "Gods! you are the man I had in the pit."

Spangles laughed.

"I am the rat in the trap, George—the person at whom you fired in the house of the double mystery. Your traps don't hold their victims very long."

Gentleman George's only reply was a stare, which did not quit his eyes for some time.

"We are alone again," continued Spangles. "You have been under the influence of some drug."

"Think so?" and the other smiled faintly, and the next moment drew a little ebony box from his pocket and placed it on the table within reach of his hand. "What brought you here, and did Jane admit you? She had her orders—"

"Don't blame your janitress," broke in Spangles. "I pushed my way past her, and my presence here is not with her consent."

"Well, what's your mission?"

Farrell's face was flushed a little, but the flush faded as he finished and he tried to show his coolness by reaching for a cigar that lay on the table.

"You must realize that the jig is up," said Spangles.

"I don't understand you. I am simply George Farrell, a little the worse with my last bout with the old drug; but if you'll be kind enough to reach me the shelf yonder I will be in excellent trim to talk."

The shelf was on the other side of the room and Spangles hesitated.

Was it a ruse on the part of the Showman-Sport, whom he had cornered, to gain time and an advantage? If he turned his back on this man would he not suffer thereby?



The Circus Detective thought fast at that momentous time and kept his position.

"You can talk without the glass," he said to Farrell. "If the drug causes thirst you can wait till the story is over."

"The story?"

"Yes, the one I came for."

The eyes got another ferocious gleam and were turned to the door leading into the hall.

"It is locked," said Spangles, intercepting the look.

"I see. You have played out a part of your game. Now, what is wanting, Mantelli?"

"I am after the truth. Don't you think you have been George Farrell long enough?"

"That's my only name."

"Don't you think it is time for you to go back to the old name—back to the one you doffed when it suited you to do so, Mark Manson?"

There was a quick start on the sport's part, and he seemed about to quit the chair, but as suddenly he settled back again.

"You see what I have picked up," Spangles resumed. "I have gone beyond the trail in New York—I have picked up a link or two in another state. I have returned to the old affair in Virginia. You are trying to prove that the child stolen from Harold Hart was a girl, when you know better."

Gentleman George did not answer.

"This child, taken from its parents to carry out the meanest revenge a man ever harbored, fell into your hands."

"Why into mine?"

"Because you are Mark Manson. The epidemic spared you, contrary to general belief; you simply vanished with the child and the mother afterward fell into your inhuman clutches in her search for her offspring."

"It is false!"

"Don't you remember the night you met Jack Fontenoy outside the tents in Fairview City? You may recall that he asked you whatever became of 'Lucy,' and that brought you two men together. I am not here to ask about that mother. You would conceal that last crime if I did. You can keep the secret, for secret it is only in your mind now, George Farrell."

"You are playing the boldest hand I ever knew a man to play," said the Showman-Sport. "Do you expect to win?"

"Never mind that. Come back to the present, Mark Manson. You never lost sight of the Harts. Time changed you and blunted the old man's senses. He took to his bosom that cold-faced girl called Floss. Eager for an heir, he took her to his home and saw her grow to womanhood; but not with the Hart blood in her veins. Floss can never inherit the ex-clown's fortune."

"Why not?"

"Because the boy lives."

The Showman-Sport breathed hard.

"It is true, and no one knows it better than you, Mark Manson," coolly said Spangles, and he quickly continued:

"The girl is merciless and revengeful. She has a hand that spares not, but now and then her nerve fails her."

"Floss you mean?"

"Yes. She has lost nerve lately, and now is nearly powerless. You have failed, Mark."

"Where is she?"

"At home, perhaps."

Gentleman George started from his chair and moved toward the door; but the hands of the Circus Detective held him fast.

"You will talk to me first. You shall not warn Floss?"

"Warn her?"

"Yes, that is your intention."

The Showman-Sport settled back in the chair, a malicious grin at the corners of his mouth.

"She's as good as warned now," he averred, and then turned his eyes away.

At the same time Spangles heard footsteps quit the door in the hall, and Farrell seemed immensely pleased.

Had the woman Cerberus of the sport's house gone out to warn the tenant of the house of the two mysteries?

"As good as warned, is she?" said Spangles. "You must tell me the truth now, Mark."

"Get at it if you can!" and there was defiance in words and look.

"Gopher has turned against you," continued Spangles. "Of late he has been playing a hand, secret and cool. You have supplanted him in the affections of Floss, you—"

The hand of Farrell checked the ferret.

"Where is Gopher?" he demanded.

"Where he can fight you underhanded and beat you at your own game."

A look of mingled fierceness and vengeance gleamed from Gentleman George's face, and he sprang to his feet.

"What have you found out?" he asked.

"This," returned Spangles, coolly. "I stand before the man who killed Harold Hart!"

"At the end of the trail, eh?"

"Yes, the game is holed."

"Fool!" cried Farrell. "There are other things for you to find out. You may be a good bare-back rider, as Mantelli; but, as Spangles, the Spotter, you do not get on so well. You have come for me, have you?"

"I have come for both Mark Manson and George Farrell, and I find one and the same person."

"Oh! indeed! But, remember that the last act in this game may be the greatest of them all."

The Showman-Sport held out his hands, white as snow at the wrists, and looked over them into Spangles' face.

Never before had he shown such coolness, and his breath did not seem to come or go while he looked the detective in the eye.

"You have no manacles!" he said with a laugh. "Aren't you afraid to take Gentleman George without them?"

"No, not now."

Farrell stepped around the little table, his eyes dropping to the ebony box which he had placed there.

"See! It contains nothing but the drug," he assured, picking up the box and opening it in Spangles' face. "It never kills, only benumbs. But this—this is better!"

With the words he sprang across the room, seized from the shelf a claret-colored goblet, putting it at once to his lips.

"I'm ready now!" he said, as the glass fell shattered at his feet.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### THE MORNING OF THE NINETEENTH.

Spangles did not miss the triumphant look that blazed in the Showman-Sport's eyes as Gentleman George went from the room in his charge.

On the stairway, however, the Showman-Sport stopped suddenly and fell against the wall.

With the movement came the fear that the man was playing his last desperate card—that the call was death's own.

In another instant the sport pitched headlong down the flight and landed in the semi-darkness at the foot with a sickening thud.

Spangles bounded to the bottom and over his prisoner, who lay on the floor with hands clenched and face deathly white. He was still alive and conscious.

The detective lifted him to his knees.

"You are at the end of your trail," spoke the sport. "Mark Manson has failed, no thanks to you, who was once in his trap, yet was snared. You can go now and trap the beauty. Tell her she need not fret about the bargain we made, for Gentleman George is at the end of the tether."

"Floss? was she in the plot?" the detective demanded.

"Why not? Without her what could we accomplish? There was the will and

the hidden chapters of Harold Hart's life. It told the story of the old crime. We had the papers. We had every card in our hands at one time, and but for you and your cunning—curse you, Cyrus Spangles—you would not be here at the end of the path."

The detective turned for a moment, for footsteps sounded beyond the door.

"It isn't Jane, for she has gone to warn Floss, 'ha! ha!'" laughed the Showman-Sport.

Spangles opened the door, but no one was there, though sounds of footsteps he surely had heard.

"You sent Jane to Floss?" he demanded.

"I did, and you will find the nest empty and everything destroyed."

"Then," cried Spangles, "you shall not die here!"

He dragged the almost inanimate man from the house, and, as chance would have it, a passing cab was hailed.

Every moment was precious now, and Spangles fairly tumbled Farrell into the vehicle, closed the door after them and gave hurried commands.

At the police station Gentleman George gasped like one nearly gone, but the police surgeon gave him new life, and in a short time he was on the mend, bitterly cursing his failure to take his own life.

Meantime the detective had left the station and was hastening toward another part of the city.

It did not take him long to run up the front steps of Harold Hart's late residence, and to enter by the unlocked door.

If Jane had warned Floss, and she had had plenty of time, the nest would be found empty—the bird flown!

Spangles heard a slight noise on the main staircase as he closed the door, and a figure appeared on the stairway, above him.

It was Floss. She was coming down placidly as if she had not played a daring hand within the last few hours.

At the foot of the stairs she stopped and fixed her gaze upon the intruder.

"Well, Mr. Spangles, what is it?" she quietly asked.

For reply, Spangles opened the door leading into the library and motioned the girl to enter, which she did at once.

There was nothing in her demeanor to indicate that anything out of the ordinary had taken place, and when in the library she turned upon Spangles, as if for an explanation.

"It is all over with Farrell," he informed her. "The man has told the story of the past and I have him at the station-house—a prisoner. He sent Jane to warn you, but—"

"I dismissed the woman ten minutes ago!" interrupted Floss. "I would not have words with her. I locked the door in her face, for I never fancied her."

"She came to warn you, miss."

"Against whom?"

"Against me."

A smile for a second seemed to give some color to the woman's face, but it quickly vanished.

"I would not be warned by that creature," she went on. "George Farrell came to this house the night of the double crime. If he has confessed, why should I keep the secret I know?"

She had taken a chair at the desk in the middle of the room, and her face was turned full upon the wary and attentive ferret.

"He came after Old Nathan vanished. You found him, you know, in the steel safe over there. He came to Harold Hart with a threat and a well planned game, but my guardian would not let him get the best of him, so Nathan Moneybox went into the safe and Harold Hart to his death. I saw it all."

"You, miss?"

"All!" answered Floss, coolly. "I looked down over the transom and saw the attack, and the incarceration. It was after that that Farrell came in."

"To bleed him?"



"No; to kill him outright."

She was not the least excited.

"You saw that, too?"

"Neyer mind; you can't use me as a witness here. I knew he was here, though."

"So did Nevis."

"Perhaps," haughtily. "I am not dealing with what my maid knows. This man George Farrell—Gentleman George—knew as much of Harold Hart's past as did Nathan Moneybox. Just what passed between them in this room he must reveal."

"But you did not interfere, miss?"

"I withheld my hand," replied the girl. "Why, don't you see I was in danger of losing all I had lived for? Nathan had a will made; he had also written out that part of his life in which he lost wife and child—the child, a boy, stolen by an enemy and liable to rise and plague me one of these days. That was the life I led, living in the shadow of an ever-present fear. Would I not stay my hand, no matter what was happening in this room? The heir might appear to ruin me. I was liable to walk from this house a beggar—to pass out into the streets of New York, not his heiress, but his disinherited ward. Put yourself in my place. Live as I have lived in the shadow of this living fear and ask yourself if you would have stayed your hand with George Farrell in this room with Harold Hart!"

"Of course he had a fondness for shows; and his written life tells why. I carried off those papers, for he did not hide them in the safe for a wonder. I hid them elsewhere. Other papers fell into Gentleman George's hands—"

"But yours, miss, you carried to the old underground passage and secreted them there. You left on the moveable stone the record of my end," broke in the ferret.

Floss, leaning toward the Circus Detective, answered:

"I did. I lost my head at the supreme moment; I lost all my nerve, and when I went to kill I stood in your presence as helpless as a child. But it is all over. I never destroyed the papers you took from the hole in the wall, and which I afterward stole back. They are in the safe yonder. The combination is the same."

"But Gopher Goldstar, miss?" queried Spangles. "This man has had a hand in the game."

"What, have they found him?" demanded Floss. "Did I not finish him in the carriage? or will the wretch live over the little choking I gave him on the ride home? Tell me!" she urged.

Spangles, who knew nothing of the incident, answered:

"He will recover to talk, I guess."

"Then he will live to lie!" she cried. "I don't know but that you ought to be paid the reward I promised for the solution of the murder mystery of this house."

She drew from her bosom a black pocketbook and opened it on the desk.

Counting out a number of bills of large denominations, she threw the whole at the detective with a little laugh.

"But you yourself have solved it long ago," he averred, protestingly.

"But I would not! You have had more than one narrow escape. I lost my nerve, fool that I was! You hint at the existence of the boy. Let me ask: Have you ever seen him?"

"I have. The son of Harold Hart is now in the city."

"I thought so! Won't you bring him up? What is he like, Mr. Spangles? Has he Harold Hart's peaked face and his queer ways?"

"He has his father's eyes. We call him Vincent."

"I half thought so! One day I found in the desk, here, a show-bill with a line drawn beneath that name. Did Harold Hart suspect that the young acrobat was his son?"

"The dead cannot solve that mystery."

Floss rose and stood like a statue before the stern shadower, her face marble-like now in its color and expression.

She darted a look toward the door and then one at the man of trails.

Spangles seemed to interpret both.

He stepped quickly to one side and placed himself between her and the door; then, with a low cry indicative of complete surrender the young woman sank back into the chair.

Spangles, the Spotter, had won! His scoop was complete!

It was the morning of the nineteenth, and in a certain room sat Joe Vincent, staring at a steel safe which seemed to force itself upon his notice.

The young acrobat had been told all, and it seemed to him that he still heard the footsteps of the tall, white-faced girl, who, after a full confession, had just vanished.

He knew that he was Harold Hart's son and heir, the lost child stolen by Mark Manson, alias Gentleman George Farrell; he had read his father's will and the self-confessed story of his life; his flight from Virginia after the theft of his child; his fruitless search for his boy and his loss of his wife; his rise from an humble gentility to be the millionaire of his street; his backing of Farrell and Goldstar, men whom he feared; his visit from Nathan Moneybox, and, finally, the admitted tragedy of the steel safe.

All this was enough to make the young acrobat's head whirl. He sat at the desk in a half-dazed state, nor did he stir until the door opened.

Then he sprang to his feet as Spangles entered the room.

"Ten thousand thanks, Spangles!" he cried, seizing the worthy detective's hands. "You have enriched me, but at the same time you have clouded my life. Floss—Floss, the cold-hearted—will go out into the world penniless—"

Spangles interrupted:

"She has gone now! Gopher Goldstar is said to be dying from her assault in the carriage, and Farrell—Gentleman George, the murderer—has lost nerve and awaits his doom. This afternoon Gloster Turk, to whom you owe a great deal, Joe, will see you, and perhaps you will have to listen to his story of your childhood. He may spin a chapter not in Harold Hart's manuscript."

Joe sprang across the room and bent over the steel safe.

"I shall have this accursed thing taken away!" he insisted, as he turned to his friend. "I shall send from the house everything that reminds me of the tragedies, and then I shall try to live."

He did all this and settled down in the place, to "try to live," as he said.

Gentleman George met his fate with a good deal of coolness, though at one time he attempted to shift the crime first upon Gopher Goldstar and then upon Floss. Goldstar paid a just penalty for several crimes connected with the mystery, and confessed how, when he visited the scene of the crime, he lost his pocket-piece—the dollar of '49.

Joe found a wife in a maiden in every way worthy of him, Miss Fairy Flake of the "Great American," and Floss passed from sight, nevermore to play a desperate hand in a game for gold and position.

Needless to say, also, that Buttons came from the hospital, himself again, and that Spangles dates his present fame as a man-sleuth from the double mystery of the house of the steel safe.

THE END.

NEXT DIME LIBRARY, NUMBER 930!

**DASHING CHARLIE'S DOUBLE;**

OR,

**THE OLD MINER'S LEGACY.**

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

## Beadle's Dime Library.

### BUFFALO BILL NOVELS.

By Colonel Prentiss Ingraham.

- 921 Buffalo Bill's Quandary; or, Velvet Bill's Vow.
- 915 Buffalo Bill and the Surgeon-Scout.
- 909 Buffalo Bill's League; or, Red Butterfly.
- 904 Buffalo Bill's Tangled Trail.
- 900 Buffalo Bill's Rough Rider.
- 895 Buffalo Bill's Secret Ally.
- 890 Buffalo Bill's Life-Stake.
- 882 The Three Bills: Buffalo Bill Wild Bill and Band-box Bill; or, The Bravo in Broadcloth.
- 874 Buffalo Bill's Buckskin Braves.
- 869 Buffalo Bill's Road-Agent Round-up.
- 863 Buffalo Bill's Death Charm.
- 857 Buffalo Bill's Royal Flush.
- 851 Buffalo Bill's Double Dilemma.
- 845 Buffalo Bill's Redskin Ruse.
- 840 Buffalo Bill's Boys in Blue.
- 836 Buffalo Bill's Sharp Shooters.
- 832 Buffalo Bill's Best Bower.
- 816 Buffalo Bill's Red Trail.
- 812 Buffalo Bill's Death-Knell.
- 794 Buffalo Bill's Winning Hand.
- 787 Buffalo Bill's Dead Shot.
- 781 Buffalo Bill's Brand.
- 777 Buffalo Bill's Spy Shadower.
- 769 Buffalo Bill's Sweepstake.
- 765 Buffalo Bill's Dozen; or, Silk Ribbon Sam.
- 761 Buffalo Bill's Mascot.
- 757 Buffalo Bill's Double.
- 750 Buffalo Bill's Big Four; or, Custer's Shadow.
- 743 Buffalo Bill's Flush Hand.
- 739 Buffalo Bill's Blind; or, The Masked Driver.
- 735 Buffalo Bill and His Merry Men.
- 731 Buffalo Bill's Beagles; or, Silk Lasso Sam.
- 727 Buffalo Bill's Lody Guard.
- 722 Buffalo Bill on the W-r-path.
- 716 Buffalo Bill's Four Shadowers.
- 710 Buffalo Bill's Laffid; or, The Deserter Desperado.
- 697 Buffalo Bill's Buckskin Brotherhood.
- 691 Buffalo Bill's Blind Trail; or, Mustang Madge.
- 667 Buffalo Bill's Scoop; or, The King of the Mines.
- 658 The Cowboy Clan; or, The Tigress of Texas.
- 653 Lasso King's League; or, Buck Taylor in Texas.
- 649 Buffalo Bill's Chief of Cowboys; or, Buck Taylor.
- 644 Buffalo Bill's Loraaza; or, Silver Circle Knights.
- 632 Buffalo Bill's Grip; or, Oath Bound to Custer.
- 629 Buffalo Bill's Pledge; or, The League of Three.
- 189 Buffalo Bill's Gold Trail; or, The Desperate Dozen.
- 175 Wild Bill's Trump Card; or, The Indian Heiress.
- 168 Wild Bill, the Pistol Dead Shot.

### By Buffalo Bill.

- 839 The Ranch King Dead-Shot.
- 820 White Beaver's Still Hunt.
- 807 Buffalo Bill, the Wild West Duelist.
- 800 Wild Bill, the Dead Center Shot.
- 639 Buffalo Bill's Gold King.
- 599 The Dead Shot Nine; or, My Pards of the Plains.
- 414 Red Renard, the Indian Detective.
- 401 One-Armed Pard; or, Borderland Retribution.
- 397 The Wizard Brothers; or, White Beaver's Trail.
- 394 White Beaver, the Exile of the Platte.
- 319 Wild Bill, the Whirlwind of the West.
- 304 Texas Jack, the Prairie Rattler.
- 243 The Pilgrim Sharp; or, The Soldier's Sweetheart.
- 85 Gold Bullet Sport; or, Knights of the Overland.
- 53 Death-Trail, the Chief of Scouts.

### By Leon Lewis, Ned Buntline, etc.

- 773 Buffalo Bill's Ban; or, Cody to the Rescue.
- 632 Buffalo Bill's Secret Service Trail.
- 629 Buffalo Bill's Daring Role; or, Dareddeath Dick.
- 517 Buffalo Bill's First Trail; or, The Express Rider.
- 158 Buffalo Bill, Chief of Scouts.
- 117 Buffalo Bill's Strange Pard; or, Dashing Dandy.
- 92 Buffalo Bill, the Buckskin King.

### BY HAROLD PAYNE.

- 883 The Man from Mexico in New York.
- 872 The King-Pin Shark; or, Thad Burr's Ten Strike.
- 861 The Tenderloin Big Four.
- 853 The Quaker City Crook.
- 844 Tracked to Chicago.
- 826 The Policy Broker's Blind.
- 829 The Frisco Sharper's Cool Hand.
- 821 The Tramp Shadower's Backer.
- 813 The Sham Spotter's Shrewd Scheme.
- 806 The Grand Street Gold-Dust Sharpers.
- 798 Detective Burr's Lunatic Witness.
- 792 The Wall Street Sharper's Snap.
- 784 Thad Burr's Death Drop.
- 742 Detective Burr Among the New York Thugs.
- 734 Detective Burr's Foil; or, A Woman's Strategy.
- 728 Detective Burr, the Headquarters Special.
- 713 Detective Burr's Spirit Chase.
- 706 Detective Burr's Seven Clues.
- 698 Thad Burr, the Invincible; or, The "L" Clue.
- 690 The Matchless Detective.
- 680 XX, the Fatal Clew; or, Burr's Master Case.

### NEW ISSUES.

- 930 Dashing Charlie's Double; or, The Old Miner's Legacy. By Col. P. Ingraham.
- 931 Frisco Frank at Glory Gulch; or, Wiping Out the Gold Duster's Gang. By Wm. H. Manning.
- 932 Detective Gordon's Grip; or, The Shadowed New York Swell. By Albert W. Aiken.

### JUST ISSUED.

- 927 Buffalo Bill's Bluff; or, Ducky Dick the Sport. By Col. P. Ingraham.
- 928 Old Sobersides, the Detective of St. Louis; or, The Crook-League Lay-Out. By J. E. Badger.
- 929 Gentleman George, the Showman Sport; or, Spotter Spangles' Scoop. By Capt. H. Holmes.

A new issue every Wednesday.

Beadle's Dime Library is for sale by all Newsdealers, ten cents per copy, or sent by mail on receipt of twelve cents each. BEADLE & ADAMS, Publishers 92 William street, New York.